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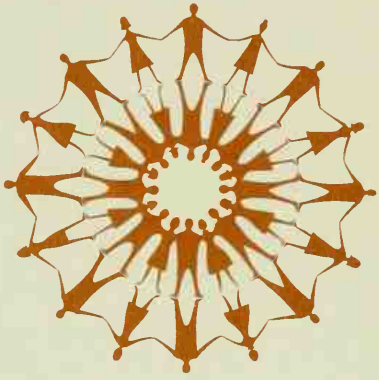

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OUR SINGING STRENGTH

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LESS LONELY
SCARLET AND MELLOW
PUPPET PLAYS
PLAYS FOR MERRY ANDREWS
ROCKING CHAIRS
THERE'S A MOON TONIGHT
FUNNYBONE ALLEY
TROUBADOUR

OUR SINGING STRENGTH

An Outline of

AMERICAN POETRY

(1620–1930)

By ALFRED KREYMBORG

PUBLISHED IN NEW YORK BY
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IN THE YEAR 1929

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FOR
DOROTHY KREYMBORG
WITHOUT WHOM
THIS BOOK
AND ALL BOOKS OF MINE
FOR YEARS PAST
COULD NOT HAVE BEEN WRITTEN

Grateful acknowledgments are due
to Robert Frost,
for permission to use the title of one of his poems
as the title of this book;
to the many publishers,
who have sent volumes for reference, and have given permission
for the reprinting of poems illustrating the text;
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of the New York Public Library,
for invaluable aid in digging up obscure material;
and to The New School For Social Research,
at whose invitation the author gave the course of lectures
on American poetry out of which part of this book was written.
A. K., N. Y. C., 7, 15, 1929.

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Well, something for a snowstorm to have shown
The country's singing strength thus brought together,
That though repressed and moody with the weather
Was none the less there ready to be freed
And sing the wildflowers up from root and seed.

From Robert Frost's OUR SINGING STRENGTH.

OUR SINGING STRENGTH

I

PRELIMINARY CONFESSION

I am a man who, sauntering along without fully stopping,
turns a casual look upon you and then averts his face,
Leaving it to you to prove and define it,
Expecting the main things from you.

Walt Whitman.

THE field of American poetry is still too young for any man to come to conclusions about it. None the less, though barely more than a century old since the dawn of Bryant, it is impregnated with the lifework of so varied a succession of dynamic men and women, as to afford the present-day student a broader perspective than the one enjoyed by his forefathers. Even with this advantageous view, he would need a temerarious spirit to venture finalities, unless by some benign fate he belongs to the infallible brotherhood of professional historians or critics. Far from asserting such a claim, or anything remotely resembling it, the present student must set himself down an amateur, prone to the frailties besetting the average being and similarly limited by the shape and shades of his own temperament.

In the face of the most ardent determination never to state impressions about a work of art without having walked round and around it, I have erred too often in the past not to do so again, and despite a personal bias dedicated to the demands of a supple catholicity, I have overpraised, understressed or overlooked too many a poem or poet. There are plenty of years ahead in which to apply the revisions of a rigorous self-analysis against slipshod judgments. But what is to prevent the older and supposedly wiser man from stumbling all over again in the presence of the poem and poet of the morrow?

It has long been apparent that the ideal critic keeps his eye

on an object and tries to describe it completely and intrinsically apart from his own ego. Herein we arrive at what confident people acclaim, objective criticism. Though this be the method to pursue in the interest of all faithful records, I cannot surmount a stubborn conviction that the subconscious temper of the beholder colors the thing beheld. Nor can I resist the commentary: This is as it should be. What transpires in the separate minds of a group of artists seated before the same landscape reaches a subjective echo in critics who examine the finished canvases. The artists paint Nature felt through themselves; the critics state their reaction to the artists. Place copies of Robinson's latest poem in the hands of Brown, Jones and Smith, and they will indite what they stoutly maintain is the truth about the book. But it is only their truth they can give you.

If I have learned anything from adventuring among men and their writings, it is this: He who wishes to travel far must travel lightly: the fewer his confirmed opinions the freer his movement. Doubtless, this heartily obvious dictum will trip over many contradictions in the following pages. It will then be necessary for some one to rush to my side with the healing repartee of Walt himself: "Very well then, I contradict myself."

At the outset of an attempt to survey the field of American poetry, I have to confess that no matter how objective the intention and how valiant the plan to play utterly fair throughout, the result is bound to be personal. Though the author remove from the scene all but his peers and compeers and employ every known device in an effort to mask himself in absolute anonymity, the pen he urges along is indubitably his own—it's the only one he has. Let any ten men sit down to the compilation of some dominant phase of American experience and each can tell but his own version of the tale.

The present version will not only be handicapped by the blind spots afflicting even the sanest of men, but it is sure to find itself at variance with the more advanced conclusions of a still later time. Despite an austere detachment toward a

march of poets extending over a series of vital periods, the student is liable to see most intimately the aims and achievements of the era he lives in, to overpraise the men and women for whom he feels the closest kinship, and almost to miss altogether the at least equal values of the past we derive from. He may even fail to discern this family descendancy by eyeing history through the wrong end of his telescope. Crippled by too large a contemporaneity of spirit, he will do well to hold the relation between past and present constantly before him and, immortally ephemeral though he is, try to envisage something of the future whose hands will lift or drop him forever. This last is of course the most difficult and dynamic problem of the three, for he will have to find his way in a period of time and space as passionately self-centred as his own. At the height of the very confidence without which he can never move forward, he must carry a healthy measure of doubt wherever he goes, and let his opinions be shadowed with jaunty skepticism. The profounder the faith of his heart the more he will need the balancing ministrations of a cool, patient head alert with pure commonsense.

It is, furthermore, the wayward fortune of an author to be incomplete without the reader. During the process of composition, the man he addresses is an hypothetical person to be wooed like an intimate: one has to converse with him and induce him to aid the contemplated design. Never quite clear about him, the author must so define himself as to give his companion something to grasp and build upon. In any event, the reader's response is cramped by the arbitrary form of the book he holds. Though the author has fought against too rigid a composition and relied on suggestion rather than statement, the union between the pair still bristles with differences. There is a division in the best of books between a man who writes in the dark and the man who reads in the open. The best of artists devote their whole lives toward spanning this gap with brotherhood.

The misanthropic Poe has described originality as "that which, in bringing out the half-formed, the reluctant, or the unex-

pressed fancies of mankind, or in exciting the more delicate pulses of the heart's passion, or giving birth to some universal sentiment or instinct in embryo, thus combines with the pleasurable effect of *apparent* novelty, a real egotistic delight. . . . The reader is filled with an intrinsic and extrinsic delight. He feels and intensely enjoys the seeming novelty of the thought, enjoys it as really novel, as absolutely original with the writer—*and* himself. They two, he fancies, have, alone of all men, thought thus. They two have, together, created this thing. Henceforward there is a bond of sympathy between them—a sympathy which irradiates every subsequent page of the book."

While I do not assume, modestly or vaingloriously, that I can lure any reader to "create this thing" with me, I am thoroughly against cajoling his interest through the flattery inherent in Poe's keen image. I can only unbosom myself along the manifold theme of American poetry. If a lover is one who must spread his affection broadcast, then the present student is one. My feeling for American poetry dominates my life; I cannot help going up and down the highways and byways of this, my land, serenading the air with my thrumming. It is not enough that I feel this way. One must have comrades. If they have more and finer things to say or to sing, so much the better. This is a chant belonging, not to one man, but to the whole nation. For American poetry, young though it is, is richer than anything any one man can say or sing about it. . . .

II

PRIMITIVE POETRY UNDER THE COLONIES

Pens writ what their swords did. . . .
Captain John Smith.

In Adam's fall we sinnéd all.
The New England Primer.

MANY are the marching rhythms of men confronting one who tramps the American past for the beginnings of our poetry. But search as he may among the records and books of the Colonies, driving his imagination across the century and a half antedating the Revolution, he will find no poetry as vibrant to us as it was at the time of its birth. Let him open the memorials of the most heroic of American movements, and still his quest for poetry as thrilling as the Revolution itself will be thrust back empty-handed. He must persist nearly fifty years beyond the signing of the Declaration before he comes to a book worth opening, not once, but for good: the work of a veritable boy who, in 1821, issued the small volume, "Thanatopsis And Other Poems." This book had little effect on the new nation. In five years, it netted young Bryant the ironically significant sum of $14.92.

One may ask why the Colonial battles for religious and political freedom did not automatically achieve an equally dominant expression in the arts. One might answer this by stretching Shelley's conclusion, "Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world" to: Great legislators are the unacknowledged poets of the world. By reverting to the Greek root for the word poet, one feels that many of the men who laid out the Colonies and eventually wrested the soil from the British Empire were makers. Among the documents they left behind, numerous sermons, orations and diaries are instinct with poetry. Turning from these

to the deeds they incited or commemorated, one learns that action above all else sang the poetry of the age, action singing from the heart and hand through the plow and sword. If Colonists had time for the pen, they held it as a brother of the sword: "Pens writ what their swords did." Or leaders inflamed the people to seize the sword. In short, the pen was so complete a slave to the will of a race fighting for religious and then for political liberty as to have had little value as a servant to literature, and still less to the branch we term the art of poetry.

The weird relics of primitive poems have mainly an historical interest, and even here, as a picture of the age or a song of its actions, they are sadly inadequate. One clings to the writers of prose: the fiery divines, the early governors, and the diarists from John Smith to Ben Franklin. Passion, intelligence and form animate the prose, crude though most of it sounds to the "modern" ear. There is an almost total lack of all three in the remains of the poets. The truly inquiring spirit, the eye which sees the present not as a thing in itself, will examine the poetry of the Colonial and Revolutionary eras with a view of disclosing whatever kinship, however remote, exists along the American line. If the communication is incomplete, if these old things are dead to him now—nay, ridiculous—a little circumspection should make him pause. For the time may come when his own ashes will seem just as thin or laughable to succeeding generations. One considers such warnings gravely, in the light of the wholesale curiosity now rising among Americans regarding their past. This is clearly a healthful sign along the road to a deeper and more independent racial consciousness. Unhappily, the average deduction drawn from a perusal of our forbears too often ends in a tone of derision. Our laughter would be lighter if some of it were directed at ourselves. So far, most of it seems to be inspired by the anguished failure of others. This is doubtless another way of saying we are still a primitive people.

The meagre poetic productions of the early days followed the lines of demarcation of the leading Colonies. The transplanted spirit of the Cavaliers in Virginia and the Puritans in Massachusetts shaped the divergent tones of a romantic and a religious

destiny. Though the Bay State led American literature almost from the start and most of the time thereafter, Virginia gave us the single poem chanting the first rebellious note on our soil. It is also the most eloquent in the whole of Colonial history. While Captain John Smith, in the midst of his memoirs, wrote an occasional line of terrible verse, and the translation of ten books of Ovid's "Metamorphoses" on the part of the Virginian Treasurer, George Sandys, has an interest because it was bred, as he says, "in the new world, whereof it cannot but participate, especially having wars and tumult to bring it to light, instead of the muses," it remained for Bacon's Rebellion to inspire the first American poem. The rebellion broke out in 1676, and for causes embryonic of the general Revolution a century later.

Notwithstanding their active loyalty to the Crown, the Virginian Colonists had fallen under the oppression of the King's favorite, Governor Berkeley, years before 1676. With the execution of Charles and the rise of the Puritan Commonwealth, Berkeley was removed in 1651; but other Cavaliers fled the drastic new government at home and sailed for Virginia. After the Restoration in 1660, Berkeley was reinstated to his former throne and vied with his royal master, Charles the Second, in persecuting his subjects. At the height of his frenzied dictatorship, the Governor observed: "Thank God there are no free schools nor printing presses, and I hope there will be none for an hundred years, for learning has brought disobedience and heresy and sects into the world and printing has divulged these and other libels." Thanks to the continuous corruption of Berkeley and the refusal of the Crown to intercede, popular dissension arose and was aggravated by the refusal of the Governor to aid the Colonists against the growing Indian raids and massacres. Supported by the suffering people, Nathaniel Bacon, a young English aristocrat, defied Berkeley and led an army against the Indians. Six months later, Bacon died. The flood of tyranny revived with such vehemence that the King was moved to declare, "The old fool has taken more lives in his naked country than I for my father's murder." Berkeley was recalled to England.

Out of Bacon's Rebellion and his tragic demise came an epitaph written by his faithful servant: the "Bacon's man" whose name is unknown. Crude and rhetorical though the body of the poem, and archaic the heroic couplets, the opening measures contain authentic poetry. They echo the Elizabethan chivalry which urged on the world-wide spirit of adventure leading to the colonization of America, and they foreshadow the love of liberty out of which American democracy was ultimately born.

> Death, why so cruel? What! no other way
> To manifest thy spleen, but thus to slay
> Our hopes of safety, liberty, our all,
> Which, through thy tyranny, with him must fall
> To its late chaos? Had thy rigid force
> Been dealt by retail, and not thus in gross,
> Grief had been silent. Now we must complain,
> Since thou, in him, hast more than thousand slain,
> Whose lives and safeties did so much depend
> On him their life, with him their lives must end. . . .

Meanwhile, the pursuit of poetry as an art found as little devotion among the Puritans as it had among the Virginians. The Pilgrims who landed in Plymouth four years after Shakespeare's death settled down to the tilling of a stubborn soil and equally vigorous preparations for a grim afterlife. If their lives were swayed by a tremendously narrow religious outlook, it was due to the severities of plowing the rock-ribbed coast with a concentrated spirit. The bibles they brought from England and the pious exhortations of the impassioned divines sufficed for them. Whatever they happened to write was Calvinistic as well. Secular writing was considered the handicraft of Satan. No record exists of a copy of Shakespeare anywhere throughout young New England. Nor can we look to the early Puritans for a thorough account of themselves in literature. This demonic tale had to wait for Nathaniel Hawthorne.

The quasi poets outnumbered those of Virginia. Despite the greater respect for scholarship in the younger Colony, a respect which erected Harvard College in 1636, it is hard not to smile at the sporadic effusions of the Governors Bradford and Win-

throp, and the fleeting concessions to poetry sprinkled among the Brahmin sermons and chronicles. Shortly after the founding of Harvard, we come to that amazing production, "The Bay Psalm Book," the first volume printed in the new America. Various divines united in translating the "Book Of Psalms" into "English metre," and their contempt for poetry, based on the belief that "God's Altar needs not our polishing," brought forth what is clearly the worst translation in Christendom. Singing of any sort was condemned in the churches as an exercise luring the mind from God. The sermons, droning along from two to four hours, were the leading event of a Calvinistic Sunday. Luckily, Rev. John Cotton, the powerful Pastor of early Boston, cited scriptural authority proving that Paul and Silas had sung Psalms in prison, and permission was granted to sing them in church. Here is the translation of some verses from the 137th:

1. The rivers on of Babilon
   there where wee did sit downe:
   yea even then wee mourned, when
   we remembered Sion.
2. Our harps wee did it hang amid,
   upon the willow tree.
3. Because there they that us away
   led in captivitee,
   Requir'd of us a song, and thus
   askt mirth: us waste who laid,
   sing us among a Sion's song,
   unto us then they said.
4. The Lord's song sing can we? being
   in stranger's land, then let
5. lose her skill my right hand if I
   Jerusalem forget.

The devout Puritans were constantly reminded of the prospects of eternal damnation. The main tenet of Calvinism elicited the most widely circulated poem of the entire Colonial era: "The Day of Doom, as a Poetical Description of the Great and Last Judgment." This epic, composed by the thrice-married preacher, Michael Wigglesworth, came forth in 1662, and as recently as 1828, many old people could still recite it in full. The

following selection represents the sophisticated plea of a group of infants against infant damnation, and the final amelioration pronounced by God.

The Infants

Not we, but he ate of the tree,
whose fruit was interdicted;
Yet on us all of his sad fall
the punishment's inflicted.
How could we sin that had not been,
or how is his sin our,
Without consent, which to prevent
we never had the pow'r?

The Almighty

You sinners are, and such a share
as sinners may expect;
Such you shall have, for I do save
none but mine own Elect.
Yet to compare your sin with their
who liv'd a longer time,
I do confess yours is much less,
though every sin's a crime.
A crime it is, therefore in bliss
you may not hope to dwell;
But unto you I shall allow
the easiest room in Hell.

Even in the first primer book, The New England Primer, 1681, children had to learn the preliminary article of Calvinistic faith:

In Adam's fall,
We sinnéd all.

The tiny couplet renders the very soul of Calvin's belief in fore-ordination, a thesis Puritan preachers enlarged with gorgeous enthusiasm. Liberty of the personal soul was held in horror; Salem banished Roger Williams for his faith in such freedom. Before the advent of the Rev. Wigglesworth, the Rev. Williams published his famous, "Bloody Tenet of Persecution for Cause of Conscience." A speedy reply came from the Rev. Cotton: "The Bloody Tenet Washed and Made White in the Blood of

the Lamb"; to which Williams retorted: "The Bloody Tenet Made Yet More Bloody by Mr. Cotton's Endeavor to Wash it White." It is clear from such titles that the prose men were nearer the flame of poetry than the poets. For sheer extravagance of phrase and rhythm, Rev. Nathaniel Ward's "The Simple Cobler Of Aggawam" deserved the Colonial laurel. Crammed with the maddest originality, the Cobler inveighed against the myriad sins of New England. Here is a passage "Concerning Women's Fashions":

> . . . when I hear a nugiperous gentledame inquire what dress the queen is in this week: what the nudiustertian fashion of the court; I mean the very newest; with egg to be in it in all haste, whatever it be; I look at her as the very gizzard of a trifle, the product of a quarter of a cypher, the epitome of nothing, fitter to be kicked, if she were of a kickable substance, than either honored or humored. To speak moderately, I truly confess it is beyond the ken of my understanding to conceive how those women should have any true grace, or valuable virtue, that have so little wit, as to disfigure themselves with such exotic garbs, as not only dismantles their native lovely lustre, but transclouts them into gant bar-geese, ill-shapen-shotten shell-fish, Egyptian hieroglyphics, or at the best into French flirts of the pastery, which a proper English woman should scorn with her heels. It is no marvel they wear drails on the hinder part of their heads, having nothing as it seems in the forepart, but a few squirrels' brains to help them frisk from one ill-favored fashion to another.
>
> These whim Crown'd shes, these fashion-fancying wits,
> Are empty thin brain'd shells, and fiddling Kits. . . .

These lines have the vigor and daring of a much later time in American poetry: a period as recent as the madcap flights of free verse, not to mention the prose poems of Gertrude Stein. That fantasy was popular with the authors of Ward's time may be gathered from a book of poems issued in 1650, three years after the Simple Cobler. It announced the arrival of New England's first poet and of America's first woman poet: Anne Bradstreet. She was a daughter of Governor Dudley and, at the age of sixteen, married Governor Bradstreet, by whom she had eight children. Among her famous descendants were Richard Henry Dana, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Wendell Phillips and

Charles Eliot Norton. Her book came out in London under the heading: "The Tenth Muse, lately sprung up in America, or Several Poems Compiled with Great Variety of Wit and Learning, Full of Delight, wherein especially is Contained a Complete Discourse and Description of the Four Elements, Constitutions, Ages of Man, Seasons of the Year, together with an exact Epitome of the Four Monarchies, viz., The Assyrian, Persian, Grecian, Roman. Also a Dialogue between Old England and New, concerning the late troubles. With divers other pleasant and serious Poems, By a Gentlewoman in those parts." A second edition, issued in Boston, six years after her death, contained her best known poem, "Contemplation," lines dedicated to the future life, true to the heart of the Puritan faith. Cotton Mather greeted this volume with the serene assertion that it "would outlast the stateliest marble." Anne Bradstreet was deservedly popular among her contemporaries. No matter how glaring the faults we find in her now, she remains the first of Americans to choose a poetic career. She is by no means The Tenth Muse she was christened; nor is her style, copied after her ponderous English master, Joshua Sylvester, worthy of more than sympathy. But she left appealing memories of the gentler aspects of Puritan life in the reveries of a Puritan wife and mother. Like many a poet before and after her, she prefaced her work with a poem entitled, "The Author To Her Book." This seems to me the best of Anne Bradstreet's poems, and still more important as the first American record of a will to serve literature for its own sake.

The remainder of the Seventeenth Century added virtually nothing to American poetry. Little though their esthetic significance, the "Epitaph On Nathaniel Bacon" and the Bradstreet poems are the main residue of our literary infancy. The insignificance of poetry under the Colonies becomes pathetically apparent if one looks across to Seventeenth Century England, where poetry rose to its highest glory. Three distinctly individual eras came to birth: the Elizabethan, the Cromwellian and the Restoration. The first immortal date, 1602, brought the opening performances of Hamlet and Twelfth Night—the year

before the great queen died. There followed other Shakespearean plays and the First Folio Edition, and the plays of Jonson, Beaumont and Fletcher, Webster, Massinger. Under Puritanism, except for Milton, and the minor poets, Crashaw, Waller and Herrick, a decided retrogression attacked the English genius. With the defeat of the Puritan Commonwealth and the ascension of Charles the Second came the age of Dryden and the playwrights of the Restoration. During the early part of this period, Milton and Bunyan were the sole survivors of the Puritan régime.

The Plymouth Colony was founded nearly thirty years before the advent of Cromwell and the Commonwealth and survived his downfall by several generations. Though Puritanism has never completely evaporated from the English spirit, it was even more deeply implanted in the American character. If Puritanism crippled the poetic genius of England, with the single exception of Milton, how much more must it have affected the men of action who laid out the Colonies. Most of these, especially the early Governors, were born under Elizabeth, and brought to America the wonderfully adventurous soul of England in her grandeur. The eccentric style of the early writings, even among the Puritans, owed its inception to the mad fire of the young Empire. But of what Barrett Wendell aptly calls the spontaneity, enthusiasm and versatility of the Elizabethan era, scarcely a trace came over into the first American letters. For a terse and vivid summary of Seventeenth Century America, we must again consult the last of the Harvard Brahmins: "It is a story of unique national inexperience." To this we must add that it takes more than a hundred years for mere man to settle a new continent, and more than a hundred more for culture to grow out of conquest.

III

TWO POETS IN TWO CENTURIES

Now in the west a continent appears. . . .
Philip Freneau.

AT the outset of the Eighteenth Century, preachers were still composing most of the verse in America and produced wholesale distortions of the school of Alexander Pope. The poorest of the group, Roger Wolcott, described the ideals of the day by confessing he wrote for "the improvement of some vacant hours." Wolcott, Mather Byles, Benjamin Colman, Jane Turell, have no interest for the student of American poetry. It is, however, of the keenest interest that a growing secularism had penetrated some of the writings. The more men felt the need of first living on the earth the less they groaned or wondered about the hereafter. With the arrival of Methodists, Quakers and Baptists, Calvinism began to weaken: hellfire no longer loomed as the sole future reserved for those whom the Lord, for some reason or another, had failed to elect His chosen. Self-appointed interpreters of a Christian God grew more humane; and the heavens mirrored the softer Image of their mystical yearning.

A school of satirists, under John Seccomb and Joseph Green, riddled the decay of the strictest Puritanism. This attack characterized the formative years of Democracy. The preacher had lost to the lawyer his former control over government. The division between Church and State was best defined in the life of Jonathan Edwards, the greatest divine in the Colonies, and the link between the thundering Wigglesworth and the later and gentler Channing and Emerson. As the Revolution neared, democratic aspirations were paramount, and the advancing literature, pale compared with the actions of the time, echoed the more vital régime. Massachusetts had to share her lead in the

thought and movement of the Colonies. The Middle States developed some of the doughtiest spirits of the new century. Edwards, the man of God, had been born in Connecticut and graduated from Yale, founded in 1701. Benjamin Franklin, man of the world, though born in Boston, was a product of Philadelphia.

Before the arrival of these preëminent men, the literature of the century was puny, and the poetry punier. Seccomb, Green and their fellows were composers of doggerel, and the contemporaries of Edwards and Franklin little better. The work of supreme psychological interest is the already mentioned "New England Primer." The successive editions of this Little Bible provided a running commentary for children on the advance of American events. The original compiler issued the first edition about ten years before the dawn of the new century. To this, John Cotton's catechism, "The Milk For Babes," was added. From time to time, the Primer was revised and enlarged. Of the estimated two million copies distributed, less than fifty remain, though the book was still in use in 1840. Beginning with, "In Adam's fall we sinnéd all," most of the later editions still dealt with the simplest piety. The secular note entered as early as 1727—the earliest edition to reach the hands of collectors:

The Cat doth slay,
And after play.

The Idle Fool,
Is whipt at School.

An Eagle's flight,
Is out of sight.

Youth forward slips
Death soonest nips.

Some of the pious couplets have an Imagistic brevity:

Thy Life to mend
This Book attend.

Job feels the rod
Yet blesses God.

My Book and Heart
Shall never part.

Whales in the Sea
God's Voice obey.

Loyalty to the Crown is expressed by, "Our King the good, No man of Blood." In 1791, this turns to, "Kings should be good, Not men of blood," in 1797, "The British King Lost States

Thirteen," and in 1825, "Queens and Kings Are gaudy things."

For the adult spirit of the Century, one deserts the Primer and the feeble pseudo poets for the line of majestic figures from Edwards to Franklin. None of these men wrote more than occasional verse, but their prose records dynamically the rise of a growing America. A few brief citations should indicate the varying idioms and rhythms of a primitive racial poetry, direct, unconscious and personal. The sermons and writings of Jonathan Edwards have the tone of mystic poetry. His contributions to metaphysics remain among the most remarkable ever set down by an American. At twenty, Edwards began a diary, one of whose earliest entries voices the deepest humility:

> O, that God would fill me with exceeding great humility, and that he would evermore keep me from great pride! The pleasures of humility are really the most refined, inward, and exquisite delights in the world. How hateful is a proud man! How hateful is a worm that lifts up itself with pride! What a foolish, silly, miserable, blind, deceived, poor worm am I, when pride works!

Another entry of the same year anticipates psychoanalysis:

> I think it a very good way to examine dreams every morning when I awake; what are the nature, circumstances, principles, and ends of my imaginary actions and passions in them, to discern what are my chief inclinations, etc.

At twenty-one, he wrote a prose-poem about Sarah Pierrepont, his future wife. The salient passages are telescoped:

> They say there is a young lady in New Haven who is beloved of that Great Being, who made and rules the world, and that there are certain seasons in which this Great Being, in some way or other invisible, comes to her and fills her mind with exceeding sweet delight, and that she hardly cares for anything, except to meditate on him—that she expects after a while to be received up where he is, to be raised up out of the world and caught up into heaven; being assured that he loves her too well to let her remain at a distance from him always. . . . She is of a wonderful sweetness, calmness and universal benevolence of mind; especially after this great God has manifested himself to her mind. She will sometimes go about from place to place, singing sweetly; and seems to be always full of joy and pleasure; and no one knows for what. She

> loves to be alone, walking in the fields and groves, and seems to have some one invisible always conversing with her.

This Calvinistic love song, in praise of one of God's chosen, is a mellow flowering of the violent forms in "The Day Of Doom." It is tempting to wander from this to the evolutionary doctrine of the next century, where Nature, overturning the God of the Gentiles, works through a medium of selection toward the "survival of the fittest." But one must not stray too far from the theme in hand. Edwards, like Wigglesworth, had his violent side, as witness the sermon on "Sinners In The Hands Of An Angry God." Here is a passage from that epochal dithyramb:

> The God that holds you over the pit of hell, much as one holds a spider, or some loathsome insect, over the fire, abhors you and is dreadfully provoked . . . he looks upon you as worthy of nothing else but to be cast into the fire; he is of purer eyes than to bear to have you in his sight; you are ten thousand times so abominable in his eyes, as the most hateful and venomous serpent is in ours. You have offended him infinitely more than ever a stubborn rebel did his prince: and yet it is nothing but his hand that holds you from falling into the fire every moment: it is ascribed to nothing else that you did not go to hell last night; that you were suffered to awake again in this world, after you closed your eyes to sleep; and there is no other reason to be given why you have not dropped into hell since you arose in the morning, but that God's hand has held you up: there is no other reason to be given why you have not gone to hell, since you have sat here in the house of God, provoking his pure eyes by your sinful wicked manner of attending his solemn worship: yea, there is nothing else to be given as a reason why you do not this very moment drop down into hell. . . .

In 1750, Edwards had to resign his Northampton pastorship because of friction with his parishioners. He became a missionary among the Indians at Stockbridge. Seven years later, he succeeded his son-in-law, Aaron Burr, father of Hamilton's adversary, as President of Princeton. Edwards died in 1758 and a few months later was joined in the Princeton graveyard by his devoted wife and lifelong companion. With the death of its ablest champion, Calvinism fell into a gradual decline.

The latter half of the century has well been termed the

emergence of a nation. The French and Indian War broke out in 1754. In less than ten years, it determined whether America was to be French or English, and for the first time brought the Colonies into a closer bond, fighting side by side against Britain's traditional enemy. Out of this loyal experience, the Colonists learned the lesson of solidarity they applied against the mother land twelve years later. It is unnecessary to rehearse again the causes of the Revolution. Philip Freneau, poet of the Revolution, sang the main items in a quatrain on George the Third:

> When a certain great king, whose initial is G,
> Shall force stamps upon paper and folks to drink tea;
> When these folks burn his tea and stampt paper like stubble,
> You may guess that this king is then coming to trouble.

Pens were once more writing what the swords did, for it must be remembered that a great number of Colonists resisted defiance to England. Seeking an adequate portrayal of the period, one deserts the poets again for the men of action. Tom Paine, who came to America in 1774, published the pamphlet, "Common Sense," in 1776, and laid down the foundation of the Declaration. In two sentences, this flaming spirit summed up the history of the Colonies:

> This new world hath been the asylum for the persecuted lovers of civil and religious liberty from *every part* of Europe. Hither have they fled, not from the tender embraces of the mother, but from the cruelty of the monster; and it is so far true of England, that the same tyranny which drove the first emigrants from home, pursues their descendants still.

It has been declared that Paine's pen was worth more to the American cause than an army of twenty thousand men. After independence had been won, Paine sailed to France with his slogan: "Where Liberty is not, there is my home." While Paine inspired the Declaration, its author was Thomas Jefferson. The Virginian aristocrat not only "poured the soul of the continent" into an impassioned mold, but he was recognized everywhere as the spokesman of freedom-worshiping

races. Familiar though they are, these lines are still an immortal battle-song, written not by a poet, but by the highest type of the men of action bred by the Revolution:

> We hold these truths to be self-evident: That all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. That, to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.

The Revolutionists divorced themselves from the old Puritan ideal by emphatically stressing their right to enjoy the earth. For further evidence of the new creative spirit, one consults the legislators, Hamilton, Madison, Jay, and the visionary orators, Henry, Otis, Samuel Adams. In his address before the First Continental Congress, young Patrick Henry described the new union in the memorably simple lines: "Where are your landmarks, your boundaries of Colonies? The distinction between Virginians, New Yorkers, and New Englanders are no more. I am not a Virginian, but an American." Samuel Adams destroyed the Tories with one broadside: "Who among you, my countrymen, that is a father, would claim authority to make your child a slave because you had nourished him in infancy?" After he signed the Declaration, Adams harangued the Pennsylvanians in the tones of an early divine: "We have this day restored the Sovereign, to whom alone men ought to be obedient. He reigns in heaven, and with a propitious eye beholds His subjects assuming that freedom of thought and dignity of self-direction which He bestowed on them."

As the reigning influence of the soil passed from Boston to Philadelphia, so two other great captains emerged: the beautiful Quaker, John Woolman, and the worldly Ben Franklin. Woolman's "Journal" and Franklin's "Autobiography" are the distinctive literary documents of the period. Woolman came forward when gentleness and tolerance, more than any virtues, were absent from the churches. In his itinerant preaching among the Quakers, he spoke against Negro slavery, pleaded for overworked animals and tried to improve the condition of

the Indians. When Charles Lamb said, "Get the writings of John Woolman by heart," he must have been touched by the deeply humane spirit of the Journal. This chronicle was issued in 1775, three years after Woolman's death, and reverently re-edited by Whittier in 1871. The father of brotherly love was heartily simple and therefore one of the wisest of men. A hundred years before the Civil War, in the midst of a passionate movement for national freedom, this American St. Francis felt the oppression of an alien African race overlooked by the apostles of liberty. His pure vision saw far beyond Democracy to present-day socialistic problems recently conquered in Russia. The following passage also catches the universal call to pacifism:

> As he (God) is the perfection of power, of wisdom, and of goodness, so I believe he hath provided that so much labor shall be necessary for men's support in this world as would, being rightly divided, be a suitable employment of their time, and that we cannot go into superfluities or grasp after wealth in a way contrary to his wisdom without having connection with some degree of oppression and with that spirit which leads to self-exaltation and strife, and which frequently brings calamities on countries by parties contending about their claims.

Contrary to the Calvinistic Edwards and the tolerant Woolman, Franklin had little concern with heavenly matters. Self-taught from childhood, he developed an immense terrestrial practicality. He even carried it into his heavenly meditations. In a letter to George Whitefield, the revivalist, he declared:

> Your frequently repeated wishes for my eternal, as well as my temporal happiness, are very obliging, and I can only thank you for them and offer you mine in return. I have myself no doubt, that I shall enjoy as much of both as is proper for me. That Being, who gave me existence, and through almost threescore years has been continually showering his favors upon me; whose very chastisements have been blessings to me; can I doubt that he loves me? And, if he loves me, can I doubt that he will go on to take care of me, not only here but hereafter? This to some may seem presumption; to me it appears the best grounded hope; hope of the future built on experience of the past

Such urbane writing was decidedly new in the new America, and Franklin's God as remote from orthodox New England as the One to whom Voltaire built a temple in his Ferney gardens. Commonsense dictated the great American's movements. The "Autobiography," deliberately planned after Addison's popular *Spectator* papers, remains the first of our literary monuments and an intimate transcript of the life and thought of the most active man in the Eighteenth Century. Franklin was the only American to sign the four transcendent documents: The Declaration, the Alliance Treaty with France, the Peace Treaty with England and the Constitution. And he was hailed abroad, especially in France, as the personification of "the rights of man." His contributions to a growing American civilization are too well known to require further praise. One may note in conclusion that the comic vein in his writings played a pioneer rôle in the long line of our humorists who found their eventual heights in Mark Twain. Franklin's "Dialogue With The Gout," his satirical "Edict Of The King Of Prussia," parts of "Poor Richard" and the "Autobiography," abound in that pompous overstatement of a slyly ridiculous nonsensicality so indigenous to American comedy. He was too utterly rational a man to fool with poetry. In youth, he had written some "Grub Street Ballads" which his brother printed and Ben hawked about Boston. Their father attacked such absurdities with the canny advice that "verse-makers were generally beggars." What America lost in poetry, she gained in her greatest world-citizen. That the times were still unripe for national poetry may be readily discerned by reverting to the poets themselves.

The early half of the century had brought the trivial poems of Parson Byles and his school, Mayhem and Cockings, Osborn's "Whaling Song," the satires of Seccomb and Green, and the first blank verse drama—a ponderous echo, "The Prince of Parthia," by Thomas Godfrey. The poets of the Revolution, led by Philip Freneau and the group of Hartford Wits, were a decided improvement. It is apparent that poetic independence still fell far behind religious and civil, and that one must wait for the

next century to usher in the first truly American poet. The Hartford Wits, like their forerunners, bowed at the shrine of Pope. Only Freneau responded to the poetic revolution of 1798: the publication of the "Lyrical Ballads" of Wordsworth and Coleridge. But Freneau was only faintly stirred by this great event. Otherwise, the New York poet resembled the Hartford Wits in their parodies of Revolutionary events. The Wits made a valiant, concerted effort to found a school of American poetry. The chief members were graduates of Yale: Timothy Dwight, Joel Barlow, John Trumbull. Freneau and the Wits were in their young manhood when the Revolution broke out, and all but Barlow lived beyond the War of 1812.

Dwight set sail for immortality in an epic of nearly ten thousand lines: "The Conquest Of Canaan." It opens with the rocking-horse couplets to which slavish souls had reduced the Pope Alexander's "Iliad":

> The Chief, whose arms to Israel's chosen band
> Gave the fair empire of the promis'd land,
> Ordain'd by Heaven to hold the sacred sway,
> Demands my voice, and animates the lay.

After these bombastic lines, it is refreshing to read the finest satire of the era: Dwight's "The Triumph Of Infidelity." Though he was a revolutionist, he remained true to the religious teachings of his grandfather, Jonathan Edwards, and played Tory to the radical changes of the day. King's Chapel, the foremost church in Boston, had come under the guidance of the genial divine, James Freeman, who, following the break with the mother land, reformed the English liturgy. The main reforms lay in the insistence on the unity of God, and a repudiation of the Catholic and Episcopal tradition of the Trinity. Out of the new liturgy published by the Chapel, the Unitarian movement came to birth in New England, and foreshadowed such leaders as Channing, Emerson and Phillips Brooks. Dwight, employing the poetic methods of a conservative England, riddled the modern divines with exquisite irony. Strangely enough, though one side with these men against Dwight, one admires the skill of the hostile critic:

There smiled the smooth Divine, unused to wound
The sinner's heart, with hell's alarming sound.
No terrors on his gentle tongue attend;
No grating truths the nicest ear offend. . . .
Each week he paid his visitation dues;
Coaxed, jested, laughed; rehearsed the private news;
Smoked with each goody, thought her cheese excelled;
Her pipe he lighted, and her baby held. . . .
At rich men's jests laughed loud, their stories praised;
Their wives' new patterns gazed, and gazed, and gazed;
Most daintily on pampered turkeys dined;
Nor shrunk with fasting nor with study pined;
Yet from their churches, saw his brethren driven,
Who thundered truth and spoke the voice of heaven,
Chilled trembling guilt, in Satan's headlong path,
Charmed the feet back, and roused the ear of death.
"Let fools," he cried, "starve on, while prudent I
Snug in my nest shall live, and snug shall die."

Dwight became President of Yale, and round him the Hartford Wits gathered. Trumbull and Barlow are the only ones whose names survive. Trumbull's most noted poems were written in imitation of Samuel Butler's "Hudibras." "The Progress Of Dulness" lampoons the conditions of clerical education. After Trumbull's hero has received his collegiate diploma, the following ensues:

Few months now past, he sees with pain
His purse as empty as his brain;
His father leaves him then to fate,
And throws him off as useless weight;
But gives him good advice, to teach
A school at first, and then to preach. . . .
As thieves of old, t'avoid the halter,
Took refuge in the holy altar. . . .

Trumbull's other epic, "M'Fingal," which anticipated Lowell's "Biglow Papers," satirized the follies of the Tory brethren. The meat of the poem is bloody enough to suit the most rebellious taste; but the style is painfully heavy, and crammed with inappropriate classical allusions, such as Claudius, Enceladus, Pallus, Maia's son, the Gorgon, Plato and so on. Though the poem was composed at the birth of a new nation by one of its

leading scholars and wits, "M'Fingal" is nearly anything under the sun but American. In the light of the Revolution, it is nearly unintelligible now. But public demand during the war exhausted thirty editions.

Even more incomprehensible is "The Columbiad" by the monumentally ambitious Joel Barlow. Barlow was one of the first Americans to win a diplomatic portfolio because of his poetry. After serving as Consul to Algeria, he was appointed minister to France. His duties forced him to join Napoleon in Russia. One of the stragglers of the Moscow retreat, Barlow succumbed in a Polish village on Christmas Eve, 1812. Here is a passage from the poem which gained him such noble honors:

> Based on its rock of Right your empire lies,
> On walls of wisdom let the fabric rise;
> Preserve your principles, their force unfold,
> Let nations prove them and let kings behold.
> EQUALITY, your first firm-grounded stand;
> Then FREE ELECTION; then your FEDERAL BAND;
> This holy Triad should forever shine
> The great compendium of all rights divine . . .

How incomparably more real and poetic were the political orations and documents of the Revolution. Barlow's "Hasty Pudding" is an improvement over "The Columbiad." Composed abroad and comically weeping over the absence of an American dish evoked in a homesick mood, the poem is amusing in small doses. But when Barlow meanders through thirty ten-syllabled lines describing the difference between French and American spoons, the reader has to call for a lighter dessert. While the Hartford Wits were unequal to the graver themes of their *Zeitgeist,* they made the first concentric effort toward a national literary brotherhood. As slavish to the tyranny of English poetry as the old Colonial soil to the English Crown, they are not to be censured for falling short of their ideals. Their country still lacked a cultural experience sufficiently rooted to give expression to an autochthonous movement in poetry. So the group shone best in the minor arts of nonsense and satire.

Like the Hartford Wits, Philip Freneau, lampooned the Tories.

He also wrote a considerable number of patriotic poems, including some on the kindred French Revolution. A passionate democrat and man of action, Freneau rose to the editorship of a radical journal in Philadelphia. After editing three more papers, this ardent son of Manhattan spent his declining years on a small estate in New Jersey, and devoted himself to the isolated pursuit of poetry. He was the first American after Anne Bradstreet to follow the muse exclusively. In two centuries, two people placed poetry higher than any mundane concern. They are respectively the most distinguished poetic representatives of our infancy and childhood.

Few of Freneau's satiric or patriotic poems have more than an historic value. His felicity in rendering the moods of Nature was his gift to American poetry. In this he must have been partially aided by the "Lyrical Ballads." Wordsworth's natural genius exerted a richer influence than Pope's snobbish artistry. Though Freneau was the first of our poets to be affected by the romantic movement, he had written Nature studies before the birth of the "Lyrical Ballads." *The Freeman's Journal*, to which he contributed most of his work, had printed "The Hurricane" in 1785 and "The Wild Honey Suckle" the following year. The latter is now his most popular poem. It has simplicity, charm and a certain quiet observation, unmarred by the rhetorical flights that destroy the work of his contemporaries and forerunners. But the qualities of the poem recede when compared with the Nature poems of the next American: Bryant. Such combinations as "fair flower," "roving foot," "guardian shade," sound derivative; and awkward contradictions shift the viewpoint. In the first two stanzas, the flower is addressed as "thou." In the third, it becomes "you" and is described as "this." Finally, the poet reverts to "thou." The moral of the last verse is an harbinger of the didactic conclusions used, abused and adored by the later New England poets. But it closes on the vivid cadence: "The frail duration of a flower."

A better poem and doubtless the best in Freneau's career is "The Indian Burying-Ground." Despite some further clichés and metrical uncertainty, it unfolds an authentic narrative of

the forefathers of the continent. The poem made an excellent impression in England. The line—"The hunter and the deer—a shade—" was lifted by Thomas Campbell in "O'Connor's Child." Sir Walter Scott helped himself to another. "The Indian Burying-Ground" is not a great poem. But the contrast between the Christian dead who lie full length and the Indian dead who sit up with their friends and revel in "the joyous feast" marks a fine imagination, and indicates the nearness of a dawn in American poetry. At a time when the Colonies had freed themselves from the British Empire, it is strange that a man of action should have let his mind stray to the old Indian Empire. Equally ironic is the coincidence of two glorious events on either side of the Atlantic: the signing of the Declaration of Independence and Gibbon's first impression of "The Decline And Fall Of The Roman Empire." Compared to Gibbon's masterpiece, Freneau's poem is infantile. But the American lad had at last learned to sing a little. Later, he might grow to a more manly stature and achieve poetic maturity. Meanwhile, the times gave what they could. While the children and the grim old mother signed articles of peace in Paris, the work of an immortal man-child came off the presses in London. William Blake had signed his name to the "Songs Of Innocence." A few years later, an obscure New England village gave birth to the youthful prodigy: William Cullen Bryant.

IV

FOREFATHER BRYANT

For Poetry, though heavenly born,
Consorts with poverty and scorn.
William Cullen Bryant.

SHORTLY after the death of Bryant only fifty years ago, his lifelong friend and critic, Richard Henry Dana, declared that his literary career "extends over the unexampled period of three score and ten years." But Bryant wrote less poetry than Keats, who died in his twenty-sixth year; while Shelley, who died before he was thirty, left about three times as much. Though poetry loomed at the head of Bryant's life, his problems as a husband and father, as a public-spirited American, as editor of the *New York Evening Post,* constantly drove him into the practical world. It is doubtful whether more time would have heightened the quality of his verse. Of all American poetic careers, his maintained the greatest evenness. There is little difference between the more than precocious "Thanatopsis," begun at seventeen, and almost his last poem, "The Flood Of Years." Both of these, and most of the intervening poetry, reveal an undeviating preoccupation with Nature, death and immortality. It had taken two hundred years for the new continent to give birth to an indigenous poet, when, not much more than a century ago, "Thanatopsis" appeared in the young *North American Review.*

Bryant's father, without Cullen's knowledge, took the poem, along with some others, to Boston, and handed them to his friend, Willard Phillips, one of the editors. After Phillips had read them aloud to his colleagues, Richard Henry Dana declared: "Ah! Phillips, you have been imposed upon; no one on this side of the Atlantic is capable of writing such verses."

Phillips replied that he knew the author very well, "at this moment sitting in the State House in Boston as Senator from Hampshire County." Dana was led to the Senate and viewing Dr. Bryant, remarked: "It is a good head, but I do not see Thanatopsis in it." The editors agreed to use "Thanatopsis," and "Fragment," and Phillips wrote to Cullen: "All the best judges say that it and your father's Thanatopsis are the very best poetry that has been published in this country." Dr. Bryant advised Phillips of his error; but even ten years later, when Cullen visited Boston, Dana himself still believed that the elder Bryant had composed the poem.

The public was not impressed by "Thanatopsis." Attuned to the most provincial standards, people still flocked to rank imitation of Eighteenth Century English poets. Wordsworth and Coleridge were known only to connoisseurs like Washington Allston (who had met Coleridge), and to Dana and Channing. Bryant's originality retarded his fame. In later years, trying to account for the poetic models of "Thanatopsis," the poet referred to Blair's "The Grave," to Henry Kirke White, to Southey, and most of all to Cowper's blank verse. He had read these poets in his father's library. The first version of the poem was written at Cummington in the fall of 1811. This version appeared in *The North American.* The final draft emerged in his first collection of poems ten years later. It is clear that young Bryant owed little more than a funereal mood to Blair and the blank verse form to Cowper. Blair attempted "to paint the gloomy horrors of the tomb" in a rhetorical vein, whereas Bryant described the earth as "the great tomb of man." To this view, he added a compensatory vision, concluding with the serene lines:

> So live, that when thy summons comes to join
> The innumerable caravan, which moves
> To that mysterious realm, where each shall take
> His chamber in the silent halls of death,
> Thou go not, like the quarry-slave at night,
> Scourged to his dungeon, but, sustained and soothed

> By an unfaltering trust, approach thy grave,
> Like one who wraps the drapery of his couch
> About him, and lies down to pleasant dreams.

Even the earlier version marks the entrance of a new note in American poetry: the deeply serious concern with Nature and death, and the full acceptance of man's place among his fellows. This view could only have come to a youth heartily versed in his own woods and fields, and permeated with the lives and actions of generations of Puritan forefathers. Equally remarkable is the mastery of the technical medium: the variations within the classical norm and the natural ease of the diction. Of the two versions, the first discloses the Pagan poet, the second adds the Puritan. The latter has been condemned as a "moral" poet. But one must judge a poet as he is, and not as a portrait of the reader. In Bryant's case, the moral, especially as he grows more mature, is the very centre of his nature, and not the tailpiece so glibly tacked on by the later Longfellow. Bryant's voice, with its drone of the ages, is the spirit of the pioneer Pilgrims contending with a primeval soil.

Across the gradual span of several decades, the poet cultivated two or three outstanding virtues. These he perfected; beyond them he never grew. His work, read as a whole, tends toward monotony: his first and second volumes, issued before he reached thirty, represent all he ever mastered. Strength contained its own limitations. Early in life, like a sturdy, frugal New Englander, Bryant concentrated his resources and eschewed temptation. "The good gray head, which all men knew" grew out of the seed of "Thanatopsis." His love, his family, his profound Americanism, his editorial service during the Civil War, his place in the affections of Lincoln, his labor during Reconstruction, his many trips abroad—these are merely hinted at in his poetry. He must have had a unique personal life, but, like a true Puritan, he rarely divulged it. Even his contacts with his immediate circle were reserved and reticent. This is the note underscored by Hawthorne in memorable letters from Rome and Florence, where the two distinguished Americans

encountered each other. I have taken the liberty of telescoping passages:

> He presented himself now with a long white beard, such as a palmer might have worn as the growth of his long pilgrimage. . . . His manner and his whole aspect are very particularly plain, though not affectedly so; but it seems as if in the decline of life, and the security of his position, he had put off whatever artificial polish he may have heretofore had, and resumed the simpler habits and deportment of his early New England breeding. . . . He uttered neither passion nor poetry, but excellent good sense, and accurate information, on whatever subject transpired; a very pleasant man to associate with, but rather cold I should imagine, if one should seek to touch his heart with one's own. . . . He is not eminently an affectionate man. I take him to be one who cannot get closely home to his sorrow (Mrs. Bryant was very ill) nor feel it so sensibly as he gladly would; and, in consequence of that deficiency, the world lacks substance to him. It is the result, perhaps, of his not having sufficiently cultivated his emotional nature. His poetry shows it, and his personal intercourse, though kindly, does not stir one's blood in the least. . . .

This acute criticism is tinged with Hawthorne's disdain of the Puritan in his own ancestral blood. His lonely heart was still more elusive than Bryant's. Lowell attacked Bryant on the score of aloofness in the "Fable For Critics," but retracted the charge later on:

> There is Bryant, as quiet, as cool, and as dignified,
> As a smooth, silent iceberg, that never is ignified . . .
> If he stir you at all, it is just, on my soul,
> Like being stirred up with the very North Pole.

Among his earlier fellow poets, Bryant's one defender was Poe; among the later, Emerson and Whitman stood by him. On his seventieth birthday, celebrated with feasting, speeches and dedicated poems, the ablest tribute came from the sage of Concord:

> I join with all my heart in your wish to honour this native, sincere, original, patriotic poet. I say original; I have heard him charged with being of a certain school. I heard it with surprise, and asked, What school? for he never reminded me of Goldsmith, or Wordsworth, or Byron or Moore. I found him always original—

a true painter of this country and of the sentiment of his own people.

To the various tributes paid to him, the venerable poet summarized his view of the post he now held as "one who has carried a lantern in the night, and who perceives that its beams are no longer visible in the glory which the morning pours around him." The first of American poets in his youth, and so acknowledged by *The North American* editors, his middle and later years had been overshadowed by the Transcendental radicals. How characteristic of the leader of the movement to rise in defense of a just concern. But Emerson must have overlooked the stimulus Bryant derived from Wordsworth. According to Dana, his friend came upon the Ballads fairly early: "Upon opening the book, a thousand springs seemed to gush up at once in his heart, and the face of Nature, of a sudden, to change into a strange freshness and life. He had felt the sympathetic touch from an according mind." Wordsworth gave him the worldly confidence he lacked in his career as a poet of Nature. Henceforth he went straight to her for his inspiration.

The earliest poems after "Thanatopsis" are among the finest he ever wrote: "The Yellow Violet," "Inscription For The Entrance To A Wood" (formerly "Fragment") and "To A Waterfowl." "The Yellow Violet" was the first of a succession of flower poems to which he brought his intimate knowledge of botany. The Inscription is fully as accurate in conveying the tranquil solitude of the forest bordering his childhood home. "The Waterfowl" is generally conceded to be the greatest of his lyrics. Matthew Arnold called it the best short poem in the language. It was composed in Bryant's twenty-first year.

Objections have been launched against the moral of the poem. Again one must note that this is the fundamental theme. For the sake of the esthetic, one wishes the moral were implied rather than stated, and that the penultimate stanza, with its ghastly reference to "the lesson," had been revised by the growing artist or the critical counselor, Dana. Some word like "image" would have continued the vision and destroyed the

didactic. With his lesson, the poet descended to a prosaic level: we lose the flight of the bird and its brother, the spirit of man. How curious that Bryant, usually the most objective of poets, should have let a dull little personal plea mar one of the purest and most truly sustained lyrics in American literature. It is also noteworthy that "The Waterfowl" drove brutish Calvinism out of American poetry and gave us a foretaste of the Unitarian faith. The poet owed this development to his father's benign influence.

Bryant received further invitations to write for *The North American*, and at Phillips' behest, wrote a survey of American poetry of the highest significance. It was the first declaration of independence in American letters. Emerson's address on "The American Scholar" is usually hailed as the first; but Bryant's essay appeared about eighteen years earlier. After admitting that the poetry of the past "is better than it could have been expected to be," the young author scored the prevailing slavery to English models. "This way of writing has an air of poverty and meanness . . . and it has ever been, and ever will be, the resort of those who are sensible that their works need some factitious recommendation to give them even a temporary popularity." The demand for originality in our literature, based on a call to the natural, received a further response from Bryant's own poems.

In 1820, came the "Hymn To Death," occasioned by the death of his father. The grief is so impersonal and death the object of such unstinted praise as to remind one of Hawthorne's attack on Bryant's restrained emotion. There is an unostentatious reference to the hand of a father to whom posterity should be fully as grateful as the son was:

> For he is in his grave who taught my youth
> The art of verse, and in the bud of life
> Offered me to the Muses. . . .

The following year affected Bryant's whole future. He married Fanny Fairchild, the girl who had inspired one of his rare love lyrics, "Fairest Of Rural Maids"; he was invited by the Harvard

Phi Beta Kappa to read a commencement poem ("The Ages"); and for the first time visited Boston. There he met Dana—a better friend and critic than poet. The reading of "The Ages" inaugurated a perennial custom at Harvard, and anticipated Emerson's address on "The American Scholar." The success of the poem led to the publication of Bryant's first collection: a pamphlet containing eight poems. The date of this sheaf, 1821, stamps the real birth of American poetry, though the Croaker poems of Halleck and Drake had preceded it by two years. 1821 also brought forth the first volume of Bryant's early rival, James Gates Percival. These additional activities were proof of a fairly general awakening toward an autochthonous movement, an awakening Bryant alone survived.

Despite the notice his pamphlet received, Bryant determined on a practical career, moved by economic exigency. His devotion to the law and politics elicited an anxious letter from Dana in which Bryant was urged to compose a long poem. Like Poe, he did not attempt one. In Poe's case, the stricture was theoretical, in Bryant's temperamental. Narrative, epic and drama, depending on a varied treatment of the broadest material, were far beyond him. Even so, his persistent expression of a few themes pursued throughout a long career gives a cumulative impression that the man engaged the muse in a continuous epic on the Puritan spirit. In 1823, *The United States Literary Gazette* of Boston, Theophilus Parsons, Editor, arranged to have Bryant contribute a hundred lines a month at the munificent rate of two hundred dollars a year. For the next two years, the young poet entered a prolific period. He wrote more than twenty poems, and some of his maturest work emerged. That his heart lay closer to poetry than any material welfare is evidenced in these stanzas:

> I broke the spell that held me long,
> The dear, dear witchery of song.
> I said, the poet's idle lore
> Shall waste my prime of years no more.
> For Poetry, though heavenly born,
> Consorts with poverty and scorn. . . .

Still came and lingered on my sight
Of flowers and streams the bloom and light,
And glory of the stars and sun;—
And these and poetry are one.
They, ere the world had held me long,
Recalled me to the love of song.

Though Nature, death and immortality were still uppermost, Bryant, like Freneau before him and Longfellow after, turned to Indian themes. Out of relics uprooted by the plow and notions gained from popular fiction, his funereal fancy drew its own vision of the eventual extinction of the white, side by side with the red race. The obsession with death is present in "The Rivulet" and in "June"—a favorite of Poe's—and the love of Nature in "March," "Summer Wind," "Monument Mountain," "After A Tempest," "Autumn Woods," "November." Poe declared that Bryant had the power "to endow nature with sentience and a capability of action." The finest poem of this period is "A Forest Hymn," distinguished for its alliance of the Puritan faith with "God's first temples." Bryant's view of Nature was gravely Christian, Wordsworth's pantheistic. The poem has a primitive air, a druidical tone marching through the forest of old, "ere man learned to hew the shaft, and lay the architrave," and God was alone in his sanctuaries. Here the poet communes with trees and finds life everlasting in "the perpetual work of thy creation, finished, yet renewed forever," and the triumph of recurring youth over "the faltering footsteps of decay." The Unitarian identity of the One in All and the All in One is handled with simplicity and serenity. The poem concludes on a note of humility, joined with the homely commonsense of the early Yankee:

Be it ours to meditate,
In these calm shades, thy milder majesty,
And to the beautiful order of thy works
Learn to conform the order of our lives.

At this time, Bryant wrote one of his rare personal poems: a threnody on the death of his younger sister. "The Death Of The Flowers" is not alone the most exquisite and melodious of

his lyrics, but it refutes the charges of Hawthorne and Lowell that Bryant was cold and unmoving. The poem is all the more moving for the restraint of the man's grief and the identification of the girl's death with the death of autumnal flowers. It was written shortly after his removal to New York in 1824, when Bryant was thirty.

The poet had decided to resign the law for literature. He wished to settle in Boston, the Unitarian capital, but was lured to New York by the richer economic prospects and the flourishing state of the Knickerbocker School. Since the publication of Irving's "Sketch Book" and Cooper's "The Spy," the island had risen to literary supremacy. The Croakers (Halleck and Drake), Percival, Sands, Verplanck and others, were the centre of a bohemian coterie typical of the metropolis, then and now. Superficial satire ruled the clubs and literary columns, and Bryant, easily the superior of all but Cooper (Irving having settled abroad), attempted the cynical in such lugubrious stuff as "To A Mosquito" and "Meditations On Rhode Island Coal." His religious heart could not compete with the light-headed town, but his practical bent led him to a position on *The Evening Post,* a party organ founded by Alexander Hamilton twenty-five years before. Bryant bought eight shares in the property. A little later, joined by Sands and Verplanck, he started a literary annual, then the vogue in England and America. *The Talisman* lasted three years. Coleman, the editor of *The Post,* died in 1829, and was succeeded by Bryant. Straight on to his death nearly fifty years later, he guided and was guided by its destinies. The muse had to bow to journalism and politics.

It is unnecessary to attempt more than a sketch of his great editorial service. Though a party man, he did not consider *The Post* a party organ. He felt his first duty lay with the American people. Paradoxically, his moral temper and detestation of slavery failed to carry him to the extremes of abolitionism. In most emotional crises, he maintained a high-minded middle course. It remained for the gentle Whittier to become the poet of slavery. The Quaker renounced his art for human-

ism; the Puritan kept his private and inviolate. Bryant's art undoubtedly suffered the loss of a profounder contact with the widest racial sympathies. Notwithstanding his prominence in events leading up to the Civil War and the part he performed as an adviser of Lincoln, Bryant never permitted fiery national issues to invade the poetry he still dedicated to Nature. And he was now too old and had settled in New York too soon to feel the benefits of the radical Transcendentalism into which younger New England poets poured themselves. Hereafter, Bryant's poetry would confine itself to the hermetic consolations of a disciple of simple beauty. In 1832, his collected poems appeared, and this was followed periodically by further editions or small collections of new poems. Different though they were in every other respect, Bryant and Poe shared a love of the beautiful. Bryant's devotion to Nature had for its principal motive the reduction of plastic values to a detached objectivity. The preface to his "Anthology Of Poetry And Song" contains these informative lines:

> To me it seems that one of the most important requirements for a great poet is a luminous style. The elements of poetry lie in natural objects, in the vicissitudes of human life, in the emotions of the human heart, and the relations of man to man. . . . The metaphysician, the subtle thinker, the dealer in abstruse speculation, whatever his skill in versification, misapplies it when he perplexes himself with the attempt to express his ideas in poetic numbers.

Bryant unconsciously described the virtues and limitations of his own poetry, and the reason why his popularity fell before the inroads of the Transcendentalists. Newness was the name the school received. At the heels of their alert romanticism, Bryant sounded old-fashioned. Poe, an ardent enemy of New Englanders, continued his vigorous defense of the veteran:

> It will never do to claim for Bryant a genius of the highest order, but there has been latterly, since the days of Mr. Longfellow and Mr. Lowell, a growing disposition to deny him genius in any respect. . . . Mr. Bryant has genius, and that of a marked character; but it has been overlooked by modern schools because dif-

ferent in those externals which have become in a measure symbolical of those schools.

This was the earliest antecedent of the tendency in future groups, hotly conscious of their own problems, to overlook the labors and achievement of immediate predecessors, and to overlook any debt due the latter. But this fault is fairly universal to poets of all times and countries. The eclipse of Bryant must have been partly caused by his indifference to Transcendentalism. He went his own way, from blank verse to blank verse, through a succession of poems which began to move one like the other. His art had matured, but it gave his readers none of the delights of sudden novelty. People knew what to expect and he gave them what they expected. Even the many restless trips, westward to youthful Chicago and abroad to the old countries, stirred few new things in Bryant. One of his finest poems, "The Prairies," came out of a trip to Chicago, a town he had seen growing from "a squalid collection of huts on the marshes."

> These are the gardens of the Desert, these
> The unshorn fields, boundless and beautiful,
> For which the speech of England has no name—
> The Prairies. . . .

Bryant's realistic imagination once more pursues the image of the ages, haunting his mind from the first, and translates the desert back to the red man, the wolf, the vulture. Then, by truly marvelous degrees, the present unfolds into a future instinct with prophecy, a prophecy borne out by the later development of the great Midwestern plains. The vision is completely realized in one of the noblest poems in the whole of Bryant, or the whole extent of American poetry.

The poems written just before the Civil War were affected by illness and death in the family and among friends and contemporaries. A sadder, more personal response toward actual death appears in "The New And the Old." It finds the customary hope in "The Cloud On The Way," and "Waiting By The Gate"—"I stand and calmly wait till the hinges open for me." The outbreak of the war inspired the unimpassioned "Not Yet"

and "Our Country's Call"; and the poems on slavery and the death of Lincoln are quite as undistinguished. Bryant's last collection of new poems had been issued on the eve of his seventieth birthday. Three years later, death removed his life-long companion, Mrs. Bryant—vide October, 1866. "Stunned and overwhelmed" by this long-expected blow, the poet went abroad with his daughter, Julia. There he buried himself in a project considered for some time past: the translation of Homer's "Iliad." It engaged the greater part of his declining years as an author. Homesickness stirred him again: he returned to *The Post* and the problems of Reconstruction. He also returned to the indefatigable duties of presiding at innumerable public functions. The "Iliad" appeared in 1870, and reflected the growing interest of Americans in classical literature, an interest shared by Longfellow's Dante and Bayard Taylor's "Faust." From the "Iliad," which had taken four years, Bryant, at the age of seventy-six, turned to the "Odyssey," and by dividing his restless loneliness among his three homes, accomplished the further task in two years. The old pilgrim had long since become a national figure. The fact that he was a man of affairs, and not a tattered poet, heightened his eminence. Edmund Clarence Stedman has left a charming sketch of Bryant's worldly success:

> It brought him near . . . to the hosts of the Philistines, but it also impressed them with a conviction that there must be something in poetry after all. They saw him visibly haloed with a distinction beyond that which wealth and civic influence could bestow. Besides, even Philistia has its æsthetic rituals and pageantry, and it was with a gracious and picturesque sense of the fitness of things that he bore his stately part in our festivals and processions.

Bryant's intensive municipal energies had included, twenty years earlier, the conversion of the country in "uptown New York" into Central Park. Along the beautiful Mall, he officiated at the unveiling of many a stony monster commemorating the loss of another dignitary. It is easy to laugh at the statues now and wonder at the zeal of the octogenerian patriot. And

rather typical of the metropolis that, after the poet's death, no one thought of erecting his bust in Bryant Park. According to William Aspenwall Bradley:

> New York, the great city of commerce and trade, literary centre as it so often claims to be, seems to have lost the remembrance of its really great men of letters, together with all sense of identity with the smaller town from which it has sprung.

Five years before the close, Bryant was visited by a renewal of poetic energy. To this final period belong "Tree-Burial," "A Legend Of The Delawares," "The Two Travellers," "Christmas In 1875," "Our Fellow-Worshippers," "The Flood Of Years" and "A Lifetime." "The Flood Of Years" and "A Lifetime" were written in his eighty-second year. The former is a reverberation of "Thanatopsis," and one is tempted to call it a greater "Thanatopsis." "A Lifetime," his last poem, pictures a parade of images from childhood on through manhood, down to the loss of his life-partner and the hope of beholding her again. This is the final stanza:

> I am gazing into the twilight
> Where the dim-seen meadows lie,
> And the wind of night is swaying
> The trees with a heavy sigh.

His long life of disinterested national service was almost over. Bryant had endeared himself to all political factions. A group of independents proposed him as a candidate for the Presidency against General Grant and Horace Greeley. He modestly declined the honor, on the ground of his age and his unfitness to grace even an obscure office. Still busy at public functions, he helped to unveil the poet Halleck's statue in Central Park. The following year, he was also present at the unveiling of Mazzini, the Italian patriot. Bryant's slow address contained the pregnant passage: "Remain for eyes yet to come where we place thee, in the midst of millions; remain till the day shall dawn—far distant though it be—when the rights and duties of human brotherhood shall be acknowledged by all the races of mankind." Bryant, who had walked all through his life,

walked back through the park with General Wilson. Climbing the stoop to the general's home, the poet suddenly fell and sustained a concussion of the brain. He died about three weeks later, in the heart of June, 1878. The date has a double significance. Our first native poet died only fifty years ago, at a time when several present-day poets were feeling their way. Our veterans, Edwin Markham and Charles Erskine Scott Wood, were twenty-six years old, and the dean of American women, Lizette Woodworth Reese, twenty-two.

V

THE KNICKERBOCKER SCHOOL AND EARLY NEW ENGLANDERS

Ah, Chloe! no more at each party and ball
You shine the gay queen of the hour . . .
Fitz-Greene Halleck.

WITH the emergence of the nation, young America had achieved religious and civil liberties, but was still to struggle with England, and later with Continental countries, for something even remotely resembling literary independence. Owing their birthright, love of freedom and the fundamental structure of the Constitution to England, the race owed still more: the very speech, the cadences, the literary glories of the language. During the days of Bryant and Poe, the average American poets were colonials in letters. Before turning to the great radical movement in New England, with its broad contribution to an indigenous culture, a cursory survey of the colonial average is in order. It is not alone an entertaining group; it has also left us some fairly valuable records of the life of the times.

The closing days of the Eighteenth Century had seen the poetic capital shift from Boston to Philadelphia and then to Hartford. New York ushered in the new century. In 1810, the island had a smaller population than Philadelphia; ten years later, it led Penn's city by fifteen thousand and Boston by eighty. A little over a century ago, New York had grown to a quarter of a million people. With the growth of urban communities, literature developed on a larger scale and centred itself round the metropolis, led by the pioneer novelists, Irving and Cooper. In 1809, when Poe was born and Emerson was six years old, "Knickerbocker's History Of New York" had appeared. In poetry, the Hartford Wits had been supplanted by the Croak-

ers, Joseph Rodman Drake and Fitz-Greene Halleck, "the Damon and Pythias of American poets."

Though New York became the literary capital and held the lead for some time, its spirit remained dependent on British models, as, later on, it would become the main American harbor for Continental culture. With a few rare exceptions, the metropolis would give no men of its own to the poetic growth of the nation. It would act rather as the spiritual and material market-place for the incoming American and imported foreign world. It would rule as the leading buyer and salesman of all things under the sun, as the shrewd commercial conservative hospitable to any man who could turn his talents into money. Success would be king of the kingly town, followed by sudden disfavor, and the coronation of the next opportunist. The man of the hour for the town of the hour, and then the latest sensation! Into such a squirming little world, Freneau and Drake were born, and Halleck, Bryant, Poe and later outsiders were drawn. Whether the poets were born there or not, they imbibed metropolitanism to at least a superficial degree and were soon engaged in a competitive struggle rising to abnormality with the passage of the swiftest time ever known to mankind.

The Croakers were in their heyday five years before the druidical Bryant arrived. There are curious analogies between Drake and his English contemporary, Keats. Both were born in 1795, studied medicine and died of consumption in their twenty-sixth year. Here the resemblances cease. Halleck was born in Connecticut, moved to New York in his youth and became a special accountant under John Jacob Astor. The Yankee outlived his poetic ally by nearly fifty years, but the call of trade soon diverted his literary talent. Under the friendly egis of William Langstaff, who owned an apothecary shop at 360 Broadway, Drake, in a truly metropolitan mood, wrote some burlesque verses to Ennui, beginning:

> Avaunt! arch-enemy of fun,
> Grim nightmare of the mind;
> Which way, great Momus! shall I run,

A refuge safe to find?
My puppy's dead—Miss Rumor's breath
Is stopped for lack of news,
And Fitz is almost hypped to death,
And Lang has got the blues.

These lines were answered by Halleck, and the young poets sent their parodies to *The Evening Post,* edited by Bryant's forerunner, William Coleman. They were accepted, and others followed in an almost daily succession. Drake's poems were signed Croaker—after a character in Goldsmith's "The Good-Natured Man"—Halleck's, Croaker Junior, and their collaborations Croaker And Co. The town topics of the bookstores and coffee-houses, most of the Croaker poems appeared from March to June, 1819, and called forth countless imitations. The skits are chiefly of interest for their dainty pictures of the times and the smartness of their versification.

The horse that twice a week I ride
At Mother Dawson's eats his fill:
My books at Goodrich's abide,
My country seat is Weehawk hill;
My morning lounge is Eastburn's shop,
At Poppleton's I take my lunch,
Niblo prepares my mutton chop,
And Jennings makes my whiskey punch.

It is apparent that an age of entertainment had arrived, a type of amusement castigated in Puritan New England. It needs no stretch of fancy to confer upon these young men the distinction of being the first newspaper colyumists, antedating Eugene Field, Bert Leston Taylor, Franklin P. Adams and their descendants. Like these modern humorists, the Croakers had their fling at imitations of Horace. There are lines to the inevitable Chloe and odes on up-to-date themes, the most notable of which is the one to Niblo's, the famous rendezvous of the early literati.

Of Drake's individual poems, "The American Flag" and "The Culprit Fay" are best known to posterity. Though "The Culprit Fay" shows traces of Coleridge's "Christabel," and introduces apocryphal fairies along the Hudson River, it contains some charming lines in a native vein. In 1823, the imagination

of the young nation was fired by the Greek struggle for independence against the Turks. Halleck's most popular poem, "Marco Bozzaris," an elegy on the death of a Greek hero, came out of the struggle. It wears poorly now, but the following lines had an electric effect in those days:

> Strike—till the last armed foe expires;
> Strike—for your altars and your fires;
> Strike—for the green graves of your sires;
> God—and your native land!

Halleck had a slender gift for facile versification after the latest British models. Since the young nation had had time to see itself in retrospect, his poems on historical themes were well received—especially the one on the Pilgrims. The poems to ladies betray an indebtedness to Byron and Moore, while the translations and adaptations of Hugo and Goethe are a healthy sign of the growing study of Continental poetry, in advance of Longfellow's broader cultural activity. Halleck's longest poem, an imitation of Byron called "Fanny," reveals a retail dry-goods shop on Chatham Street when near-by Pearl and Hanover Square were "the great world" of the time. The lilting stanzas contain the first poetic reference to Tammany:

> There's a barrel of porter at Tammany Hall,
> And the bucktails are swigging it all the night long . . .

The ode to his native state, Connecticut, records the independent spirit of the new nation—

> And where none kneel, save when to Heaven they pray,
> Nor even then, unless in their own way.

Halleck's dirge on the early death of Drake is an appealing lyric. Wordsworth's influence is evident in its admirable simplicity.

> Green be the turf above thee,
> Friend of my better days!
> None knew thee but to love thee,
> Nor named thee but to praise.

The rest of the Knickerbocker School rose between the advent of the Croakers and the founding of various magazines in the

thirties and forties, led by *The Knickerbocker Magazine* in 1833. With the arrival of the more vigorous, more realistic, more radical group around Boston, reaching its height in the founding of *The Atlantic Monthly* in 1857, the Knickerbocker School declined. Two years before, so conspicuous were the powers of the magazine that it issued an enormous illustrated edition known as *The Knickerbocker Gallery*. This may now be looked upon as the monument and tomb of the times. The magazine lasted but a few years longer and was eclipsed by the rise of *Harper's Weekly*—also in 1857. Along with the *Knickerbocker*, the more ephemeral ventures, such as *Godey's Lady's Book*, *The American Monthly*, *The New York Mirror*, housed the poems of the day; but the most comprehensive survey may be found in Rev. Rufus Griswold's "Poets And Poetry Of America and Female Poets Of America," supplemented by a study of the encyclopedic records of E. A. Duyckinck. The literary prince of the town was the gay bohemian and fop who guided most of its editorial destinies: Nathaniel Parker Willis.

The general poetic characteristics of the growing island were an extension of the clever sophistication of Halleck and Drake. Oddly enough, somewhere in New York and somewhere down on Long Island, the two Titans of American literature were born during the year that brought out the Croaker poems. Fame was denied to the prose giant, Herman Melville, until long after his death, while the first "Leaves Of Grass" of Walter Whitman did not appear until 1855, heralded solely by Emerson. The simultaneous publication of *The Knickerbocker Gallery* was a vaster event for the town. Did not the whole country contribute contributions to the monument? The charm, wit and sentiment of the metropolitans, abetted by the occasional pieces sent by friendly Puritans and Transcendentalists, were certain to obscure the handful of leaves issued by the Brooklyn printer. Over a period of three or four decades, a garrulous little host busily buzzed about the cafés, clubs and smart shops of the town. A host of little names still remains, but all too little of the poetry. To any one born in New York at a later time, how melancholy is the sight of so many gravestones un-

worthy of commemoration. Having beheld the unparalleled growth of the city, the ferocious pace, the Brobdingnagian skyscrapers, the superhuman changes we call progress, and the destruction and forgetfulness in the path of advancement, and each new year madder and swifter than the year before—exultation is halted by doubt and skepticism. If the most that remains of our spiritual past is so infinitesimal, what is to become of the hasty, quickly digested manifestations of the present? Such questions tend to philosophy, and New York more and more is less and less the home for anything so slow as mere thought.

The first editor of *The Knickerbocker Magazine,* like so many first editors of American ventures, was a young poet. Though he died less than fifty years ago, what does the name of Charles Fenno Hoffman signify now? He was also associated with *The New York American, The American Monthly, The New York Mirror* and *The Literary World;* but of his poems only "Monterey," a harmless affair about gallantry in battle, and several tributes to wine, woman and song, survive. The things to the ladies are the usual bloodless effusions composed by any other buck of the period.

> We parted in sadness, but spoke not of parting;
> We talk'd not of hopes that we both must resign;
> I saw not her eyes, and but one tear-drop starting,
> Fell down on her hand as it trembled in mine.

Griswold, who praised nearly every one but Poe, compared Hoffman's "antique song" with "the richest melodies of the time of Herrick and Waller."

The Knickerbocker editorship passed on to Lewis Gaylord Clarke, whose twin-brother, Willis Gaylord Clarke, gained momentary fame through the wedding of conventional affections with conventional metres. An even more melancholy prospect confronts the student who turns back to the pages of Poe's "Literati." Among the thirty-eight authors embedded in his savage criticism and all-too-frequent honey—honey reserved for the "females"—only a few are remembered. The outstanding names, not all of them local, are: Bryant, Willis, Halleck, Hoff-

man and Epes Sargent among the gentlemen, and among the ladies, Anna Cora Mowatt, the author of "Fashions," Emma C. Embury, Frances Sargent Osgood, Lydia Maria Child and Elizabeth Bogart. To these may be added the lady to whom he was engaged after Virginia's death: Sarah Helen Whitman. Mrs. Whitman broke off the engagement, but defended Poe against critics after his death. Of all his inamoratas and worshipers, the Providence poet was the most accomplished. Her sonnets on Poe are a loftily solemn rendering of their relationship, a union compact, like all his unions, of the soul, of dreams, and of a rendezvous in the hereafter. Though only the most spiritual women and those well along in years inspired the hapless poet, he bequeathed to them the power of echoing his language. Thus Mrs. Whitman:

> Oft since thine earthly eyes have closed on mine,
> Our souls, dim-wandering in the hall of dreams,
> Hold mystic converse on the life divine,
> By the still music of immortal streams.

Concerning Mrs. Osgood, Poe's praise was well nigh unqualified. She wrote verses as a child and contributed to Mrs. Child's *Juvenile Miscellany*. In the forties, Mrs. Osgood issued three volumes with flowery titles and at one time used the pseudonym, "Florence." She also edited "The Poetry Of Flowers And The Flowers Of Poetry." Here is the loveliest bouquet Poe handed her:

> In that vague and anomalous something which we call *grace* for want of a more definite term . . . Mrs. Osgood has assuredly no superior in America, if indeed she has any equal under the sun.

Graceful indeed her poems are, and "The Dancing Girl," of which Poe was particularly fond, is neither "forced or artificial." Most of her poems, light though they are in contrast with Mrs. Whitman's sonnets, owe an equal debt to the master, and were written after Mrs. Osgood's removal from New England to New York. In her delicate tribute to the deceased Israfel, dutifully enough, the pupil borrowed the refrain of "The Raven"—Nevermore.

Mrs. Child was more distinguished in other fields than poetry. In 1840, she collaborated with her husband in the founding of *The National Anti-Slavery Standard* which played an active part in the lives of the New England reformers. Elizabeth Bogart's "He Came Too Late" is about all that survives of her sentimental songs, and the title is enough to hint at the long line of literary ladies who have since had recourse to this unhappy theme. Mrs. Embury's "Love Unsought" refers to the lady who must speak her love for want of the man's proposal, and another poem describes the loyalty of a widow to her late husband in the face of a "honey'd wooer." "A Maiden At Her Busy Wheel" mocks at Love to the refrain: "The gather'd rose and the stolen heart can charm but for a day." Mrs. Embury published three highly popular volumes of verse. Griswold crowned her "a woman of genius." For the other literary ladies of the period, not directly connected with New York, we also turn back to the indefatigable anthologist: Hanna F. Gould, Maria Brooks (Maria del Occidente), Lydia Huntley Sigourney, etc., etc. They are no better and no worse than the Poe poetasters, and decidedly below the school of independent American women ushered in by Emily Dickinson. Maria Brook's chief claim to distinction lay in the pseudonym given her by Southey and his courteous editorial labors in behalf of her poem, "Zophiel," published in England. Mrs. Sigourney published the staggering number of fifty-three volumes of verse and prose, was immensely popular and hailed by one critic as a "female Milton." That she made "the world wiser, happier, holier," as another critic avowed, was undoubtedly true, but that she left much beauty behind or left any poems at all, is harder to prove.

Returning to the Knickerbocker gentlemen, we come to the beloved dandy and the prince of light literature, N. P. Willis. He was born the month before Longfellow, and in the same city of Portland, Maine. Willis' father was a Calvinist minister, and the founder of *The Youth's Companion*. Even in the midst of that Calvinism which had begun to veer to Unitarianism, Willis, according to Barrett Wendell, was "the most elaborate

fop ever seen on the shores of Massachusetts Bay." In search of more exciting adventure, the young poet descended on New York and founded *The American Monthly,* later to be merged with *The New Mirror,* a magazine established by General George P. Morris, author of "Woodman, Spare That Tree," with Samuel Woodworth, author of "The Old Oaken Bucket." Willis arranged to go abroad while his partner, Morris, stayed at home and supplied him with a penurious weekly allowance. There began those fabulous wanderings recorded in the bohemian letters the fop contributed to *The Mirror.* The best of Willis' writings, they render vivid etchings of the famous Forties. The poet's handsome air, especially with the ladies (he married an English heiress), surmounted many social predicaments, and his ever-graceful pen, the most graceful of his time, supported his personal charm. He was a journalist of the first order and when he returned to America and married again (the first wife having died), he founded a weekly with Morris: *The Home Journal.* The needs of a livelihood drove him into perpetual journalism, but his ephemera sometimes touched the skirts of literature. Poe, associated with Willis for awhile, paid tribute to him in "The Poetic Principle." While deploring his colleague's frequent flirtation with *vers-de-société,* he admired the energy and idealism of the poem by which Willis is most remembered: "Unseen Spirits." Since that poem was composed, countless poets have made countless excursions into the lives of the *fille de joie.* Possibly Poe, himself a social outcast, was moved by the introduction into American literature of an unusual girl. This unfortunate is contrasted with "a lady fair" who kept, as it were, her virtue intact—

> For all God ever gave to her
> She kept with chary care.

The description of the "lily-pale" girl is the essence of polite reticence, and the closing lines, redolent of the Oscar Wilde of the Naughty Nineties, drags in the appropriate moral:

> But the sin forgiven by Christ in Heaven
> By man is cursed alway!

Occasionally, Willis reverted to the days of his youth, and wrote devotional and biblical poems in the orthodox manner. For the most part, like the many men and women surrounding his charming person, he steeped himself in the lightsome pastimes of the day.

Epes Sargent, another Yankee who emigrated to New York, was associated with Griswold and Park Benjamin in *Brother Jonathan* and *The New World.* Sargent wrote the rollicking chantey, "A Life On The Ocean Wave," and a number of plays, of which "The Bride Of Genoa" won popularity. The industrious Benjamin, another Yankee, was also connected with *The New-Yorker,* which he edited with Horace Greeley. Benjamin's verse oscillated between the metropolitan and the Puritan. On one side he could write about a sexton who sings "I gather them in, I gather them in," and on the other he harked back to his ancestry: "Press on! there's no such word as fail!" It is a thankless task to continue disinterring the poets whose few surviving lines or verses differentiate them from their fellows. Anthologists from Griswold to Stedman have saved them from oblivion, and a study of the heroic labors of these patriotic editors will bring to light other early minor New York and New England poets: Robert Treat Paine, author of "Adams And Liberty" and of the "Invention Of Letters," for which he received five dollars a line; Joseph Hopkinson and "Hail, Columbia"; Washington Allston, the Southern poet and painter, identified with England and New England through his attachment to Coleridge and to Richard Henry Dana and *The North American Review;* James A. Hillhouse, author of several ponderous five-act poetic tragedies; the banker-poet, Charles Sprague; John Howard Payne and "Home, Sweet Home"; and John Neal, who found his way into Lowell's "Fable For Critics"—

> Who might have been poet, but that in its stead, he
> Preferred to believe he was so already.

Most of these poets were born before Bryant. None equaled the work of Carlos Wilcox, the New Hampshire preacher, of John Pierpont, author of "Airs Of Palestine," or of Bryant's

great rival, James Gates Percival. For some reason, Wilcox has received the least attention from posterity. Unlike his minor contemporaries, he did not reach longevity, but the two uncompleted poems left behind at his early demise, "The Age Of Benevolence" and "The Religion Of Taste," contain moving passages. His nature poems, with their grave blank verse, might have been written by Bryant. Pierpont indulged his talent in many varied metres, but the results were mostly provincial—hence their momentary popularity. Here is a typical instance of heavily freighted Parnassian allusions wedded to Pope's heroic couplets:

> See, there Parnassus lifts his head of snow;
> See at his foot the cool Cephissus flow;
> There Ossa rises; there Olympus towers;
> Between them, Tempè breathes in beds of flowers. . . .

and so on, line after line, with references to Arion, Cithæron, Amphion, Hæmus, Hebrus, Orpheus, the Nereids, Tritons and all. It is hard to conceive how Percival came to rival Bryant even for a day. He was the first poet of the period to publish a book; his "Prometheus" appeared the year before the "Thanatopsis" pamphlet. The classical pretensions which occasioned Percival's rise to fame were riddled by Lowell's devastating essay on the poet. Lowell looked upon these pretensions as howlingly funny, but they seem infinitely pathetic in retrospect. A poet's self-delusions on immortality are among the tragic, not the comic manifestations of human pride and frailty. Percival's poem on "Consumption" is noteworthy, as in Poe, for its portrait of the essential attributes of the highest womanhood:

> There is a sweetness in woman's decay,
> When the light of beauty is fading away . . .
> When all that was bright and fair is fled,
> But the loveliness lingering round the dead.

Between Bryant, the first American poet, and Emerson, the first great rebel, there is another host of names, too numerous and too insignificant for extended mention. The poems of Brainard, Sands, Mellen, Peabody, and of Emerson's early minor

contemporaries, may be found in Griswold, where most of them receive more space than the pages allotted to Poe or to the father of Transcendentalism. In New York, we need but turn to the leading figures, Bryant and Poe, to note how puerile, ineffectual and deficient in vital contacts, either with experience or art, these minor voices are; and the gap is widened when we come to the Concord pioneer destined to stir the race to its foundations and to sail "the ship of state" on grander seas. The little men and women composing the poetic set of the island were earnest enough inside their limitations. Their love of letters is evidenced by the many valiant periodicals they founded and fought for. And the dedication of most of their energies to pleasure is praiseworthy in the light of a land bounded by hell-fire Calvinism. But alas for their inexperience. They seem more remote than any other pioneer group of the nation. Too often betrayed into that facility which gains the quickest public attention, the muse possessing them was too light to endure the stouter, deeper, more poignant experience of the spirit that labors in silence and obscurity. Of this universal spirit, Melville in prose and Whitman in poetry were the noblest descendants. They were crowded out by the garrulous band of pretty story-tellers and light lyrists who infested and ran the market-place. To appreciate the masculine stature of the printer who set up the Leaves, one need but ponder the Knickerbocker School into which he was born and *The Knickerbocker Gallery* to which nearly all the writers of his time, excepting himself, were invited to contribute. The year, 1855, has a dual significance of the most ironic proportions. *The Gallery* was hailed all over the country while only one copy of the Leaves found a purchaser.

VI

THE WEARY WAYWORN WANDERER

And the fever called "Living"
Is conquered at last.

Edgar Allan Poe.

EDGAR ALLAN POE, offspring of two strolling players, had a genius, greater than any other American author, for provoking critics to controversy. By some cosmic irony, he had asked his arch-enemy, the then leading anthologist, Rev. Rufus Wilmot Griswold, to act as the biographer and testator of his life work, and the Rev. Rufus seized the opportunity of burying Poe twice over under an abusive mountain of disreputable charges. A controversy set in, the detonation of whose charges and countercharges have been heard and taken up by countless other scholars, psychologists and fantasts. A good deal of the fame Poe craved with the pride of his sensitive soul rose out of his personal records over and above his achievement as a literary artist. Griswold's scandalous portrait of the man was an unconscious act of the most lasting friendship. Each new generation has brought its own machinery to the attempted solution of Poe's tragedy and the added defense of his name. With the advent of further discoveries in scientific laboratories, further revisions and finalities of judgment have been confidently made. Psychoanalytic methods are the latest approach to the venerable case; doubtless these will be refuted to-morrow with to-morrow's later accomplishment. If only an iota of the same insight had been accorded to Poe during his lifetime; or if some of this heart's blood were diverted to some successor in a similar plight! Posthumous pity merely gives still another critic an opening for adding to his, if not to Poe's fame, and to his, if not to Poe's income. Under the heap of documents, Poe, the artist, has nearly vanished. It is almost impossible to view him

with dispassionate interest. He remains as strange an enigma as he was to the smaller America he confronted so valiantly.

Poe had a precise eye and ear for his own poetic intentions. His fantastic imagination was guided by a critical faculty not usually associated with a moonlight temperament. In his foreword to the last edition of his poems, he stated:

> These trifles are collected and republished chiefly with a view to their redemption from the many improvements to which they have been subjected while going "the rounds of the press." I am naturally anxious that what I have written should circulate as I wrote it, if it circulate at all. In defense of my own taste, nevertheless, it is incumbent on me to say that I think nothing in this volume of much value to the public, or very creditable to myself. Events not to be controlled have prevented me from making, at any time, any serious effort in what, under happier circumstances, would have been the field of my choice. With me poetry has been not a purpose, but a passion; and the passions should be held in reverence; they must not—they cannot at will be excited with an eye to the paltry compensations, or the more paltry commendations, of mankind.

The "events not to be controlled" refer to the wretchedly paid quantities of hack-work to which Poe had to subject himself. In the face of a confirmed incapacity to get along with his fellows over an extended period, his ability to earn any money was quite miraculous; still more so his power to compose things after his own heart. The handful of poems left behind at his early demise were the result of severe, sporadic revisions. His egregious egoism never drove him to coddling his art. Caustic with contemporaries who fell under his critical pen, he was still more caustic with himself. A man as quixotic as Poe, fond of theatrical hoaxes and prevarication, might have flung the word, "trifles," out of a private resentment against the world of his time. The esthetic idealist, conscious of the poetry he felt himself capable of, might also have led him to dub his performance with contempt.

Like Bryant, Poe gave early evidence of originality. His first books—"Tamerlane," anonymously issued at eighteen, and "Al Aaraaf," two years later—betray little beyond a pervasive

melancholy, an obsession with death and an occasional fastidious phrase. The real Poe did not emerge until the third volume, 1831. He described the first two as "the crude compositions of my earliest boyhood." But the opening lines of "The Lake" have the chanting cadences of the later Poe, modified by his indebtedness to Coleridge:

> In spring of youth it was my lot
> To haunt of the wide world a spot
> The which I could not love the less,
> So lovely was the loneliness
> Of a wild lake, with black rock bound,
> And the tall pines that towered around.

Many another line or passage foreshadowed his permanent disdain of reality as material for poetry. The prelude to "Al Aaraaf" is an attack on science. "Oh, that my young life were a lasting dream!" one poem begins, and another closes: "Is all that we see or seem but a dream within a dream?" Young Poe was deeply intoxicated with the new English romanticism.

His third collection appeared when he was twenty-two. Dedicated to the West Point Cadets, it contained among its eleven numbers, "To Helen," "Lenore," "Israfel," and the first version of "The City In The Sea." The composition of these other-world poems in the young military academy was only exceeded by the circumstantial dedication. Poe had earned a reputation for lampooning the officers, and the cadets subscribed to the volume in anticipation of owning the satires in toto. Several hundred copies were ordered in advance. Fortunately, the poet was expelled from West Point before the book appeared. It bore the title, "Poems, Second Edition," and was issued by a New York publisher, Elane Bliss. In a preface addressed to "Mr. B," Poe set forth the conditions hounding an American author:

> You are aware of the great barrier in the path of an American writer. . . . Our antiquarians abandon time for distance, our very fops glance from the binding to the bottom of the title page, where the mystic characters which spell London, Paris, or Geneva, are precisely so many letters of recommendation.

The preface concluded with the embryo of the famous lecture of later years: "The Poetic Principle."

> A poem is, in my opinion, opposed to a work of science by having, for its *immediate* object, pleasure not truth. . . . Music, when combined with a pleasurable idea, is poetry, music, without the idea, is simply music: the idea without the music, is prose from its very definiteness.

Except for the phrase, "in my opinion," the author of "Poems" had quietly plagiarized a passage from Coleridge's "Biographia Literaria." Though most of the poems gained their final form in revised editions, the book stamped Poe as a true original. The lines, "To Helen," were occasioned by the death of Mrs. Stanard, who, along with Poe's adopted mother, Frances Allan, had been the guiding genius of his youth. Like Mrs. Allan, she died suddenly, and tinged his remaining life with an adoration of death, the lost woman, and visions beyond the grave. Posterity considers "To Helen" one of the immortal lyrics in the language. Modern ears may quibble over the alliteration in the fourth line and wish that the echo fell on any other letter than w: "the weary, wayworn wanderer." This was one of the rare instances where Poe resigned music to the expression of a meaning. His ear, attuned to the subtlest rhythms, was not altogether faultless in harmony. But a critic who frets too long over a single line is liable to miss the full beauty of an otherwise masterly song.

Though Poe's poetry and prose tales had an ultimate influence abroad greater than that of any other American of his time, there is little trace in his work of the soil from which he had sprung. Poe was indeed, as some one has said, "the man without a country." One might even say, the man without an earthly home, an exile whose disembodied spirit longed for a planet where the imagination could dwell alone. This mood first appears in the autobiographical Israfel:

> If I could dwell
> Where Israfel
> Hath dwelt, and he where I,
> He might not sing so wildly well

A mortal melody,
While a bolder note than this might swell
From my lyre within the sky.

This is not the speech of human beings. It has an archaic tone, traceable again to the romantic Coleridge, and to Moore and Shelley. As Poe rose out of obscurity, he was soon at odds with most of his contemporaries. New Englanders, excepting Lowell, did not exist for him, nor he for them. Emerson dubbed him the "jingle-man"—a harsh expression from that quarter. It implies a monotony of accent of which Poe was not guilty. His metres and rhymes are irregular: he followed Lord Bacon's, "There is no exquisite beauty without some strangeness in the proportions." Like Bryant, Poe was content to perfect a few variable strings. The Puritan's music was grave and Christian, the Southerner's incorporeal. Both men courted death, Bryant as the tomb of man, Poe as the haven of lost love. Bryant was the naturalist, Poe the supernaturalist, and both were lonely amid crowds. Bryant was at home in the woods closely surrounding his life from boyhood on. Poe, like his master, Coleridge, wandered restlessly and was only at home in the imagination. Paradoxically, Poe shared Coleridge's scientific bent, and a thoroughly practical strain with respect to criticism. Bryant and Poe created an unconscious American parallel to the authors of the "Lyrical Ballads." Both turned to the Ballads early in life, Bryant drinking at the "clear, cool spring" of the Pantheist, and Poe imbibing the fascination of the opium-eater. Out of the naturalistic and romantic tendencies of these parallels came much of later American, as well as British poetry. Slight though the body of Poe's performance, it waged an extraordinary effect on future generations, especially in France. His influence on recent American poetry has been indirect: a line descending through Baudelaire, Mallarmé and Valéry, through Symbolism into Imagism, and back to America. Poe's influence has been profounder than his performance as a poet. He is the forefather of literary moonlight.

Poe was primarily concerned with the manner of writing. It is here he falls behind his critical model, Coleridge. While

Coleridge insisted on the "pleasurable activity of mind" to be enjoyed by the reader, he described the poet as one who "brings the whole soul of man into activity. . . . He diffuses a tone and spirit of unity, that blends, and (as it were) *fuses*, each into each, by that synthetic and magical power, to which I would exclusively appropriate the name of Imagination."

> (And Imagination) reveals itself in the balance or reconcilement of opposite or discordant qualities; of sameness, with difference; of the general with the concrete; the idea with the image; the individual with the representative; the sense of novelty and freshness with old and familiar objects; a more than usual state of emotion with more than usual order; judgment ever awake and steady self-possession with enthusiasm and feeling profound or vehement; and while it blends and harmonizes the natural and the artificial, still subordinates art to nature; the manner to the matter; and our admiration of the poet to our sympathy with the poetry.

Coleridge was too chronically indolent to achieve, except at the outset of his brilliant career, poetry fulfilling this magnificent ideal. The "person on business from Porlock" who interrupted the writing of Kubla Khan was Coleridge as much as a stranger knocking on the door. Poe's creative and critical work were a closer match because the ideals he set himself were narrower and easier to master. His essays on "The Poetic Principle," "The Rationale Of Verse," "The Philosophy Of Composition," sum up his opinions with the utmost vigor. Impelled by his hatred of the popular Transcendental School, he attacked the didactic which assumed

> . . . tacitly and avowedly, directly and indirectly, that the object of all Poetry is Truth. Every poem, it is said, should inculcate a moral; and by this moral is the poetical merit of the work to be adjudged. We Americans especially have patronized this happy idea; and we Bostonians, especially, have developed it in full. We have taken it into our heads that to write a poem simply for the poem's sake, and to acknowledge such to have been our design, would be to confess ourselves radically wanting in the true Poetic dignity and force:—but the simple fact is, that, would we but permit ourselves to look into our own souls, we should immediately there discover that under the sun there neither exists nor *can* exist any work more thoroughly dignified—more supremely

> noble than this very poem—this poem *per se*—this poem which is a poem and nothing more—this poem written solely for the poem's sake.

This was salutary criticism at a time when American poetry needed it sorely, and it gave the slogan, Art for Art's sake, a prominence it had not attained hitherto in a community devoted to practical affairs. Progress attracted the national mind and progress meant the continued conquest of material things. Nor had the word, Beauty, found a deep niche in the American lexicon. Poetry had to serve a utilitarian purpose. The greater part of Poe's warfare against Concord and Cambridge was carried on against Longfellow, much though he admired the latter's artistic skill. Longfellow, from the throne of his popularity, finally responded to the cannonade: "The harshness of his criticism I have never attributed to anything but the irritation of a sensitive nature, shaped by some indefinite sense of wrong." The gentle poet came fairly close to the truth.

Poe's concern with the poem per se is fully disclosed in his famous account of the writing of "The Raven." He restricted the form of Beauty to a strait-jacket of which melancholia must be the sole occupant. "Regarding, then, Beauty as my province, my next question referred to the *tone* of its highest manifestation—and all experience has shown that this tone is one of *sadness.*" Then came his search for the "key-note in the construction of the poem," and he perceived "that no one had been so universally employed as that of the *refrain,*" whose nature must be sought in a word containing "the long *o* as the most sonorous vowel, in connection with *r* as the most producible consonant. . . . In such a search it would have been absolutely impossible to overlook the word, 'Nevermore.' In fact, it was the very first which presented itself. The next *desideratum* was a pretext for the continuous use of the one word—" and Poe thought of a "non-reasoning creature capable of speech; and, very naturally, a parrot, in the first instance, suggested itself, but was superseded forthwith by a Raven—" a bird, to tell the truth, Poe had found in "Barnaby Rudge." And had not the

poet had word from Dickens that Godwin wrote his "Caleb Williams" backwards? Proceeding along these lines, Poe next asked himself—"of all melancholy topics . . . what is the *most* melancholy?" and "death—was the obvious reply." It followed that "the death of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world—and equally is it beyond doubt that the lips best suited for such a topic are those of a bereaved lover." Poe then sat down and wrote the poem for the most part backwards, and earned his friend Lowell's couplet:

> There comes Poe, with his raven, like Barnaby Rudge,
> Three fifths of him genius and two fifths sheer fudge.

Possibly, a good deal of Poe's superlative confession leans on the respective shoulders of prevarication and literary piracy. This view is offensive to the popularly sentimental picture of the man dashing off his sorrow over the loss of his child-wife, Virginia. But one feels, in "The Raven," that the spirit of death did not possess him so much as he possessed the spirit. The motives of the composition are steeped in the type of mystification Poe, the orphan of actors, loved to portray. The poem won an immediate and immense recognition and gave its author a chance to recite it on any and all occasions, public and private, throughout the last few years of his wretched existence. Wherever the Literati abounded, led by ladies who imitated him and whom he adored in a literary fashion, Poe was the social prince. Whenever he received an offer to lecture for money, "The Poetic Principle" usually led the program and "The Raven" closed it by unanimous request. Thus did a conscious artist sway an unconscious audience. Other-worldliness, completely controlled by a keen intellectual capacity, was Poe's *metier*. Perfect inside his self-appointed range, no man was more paradoxical, and most of his posthumous charm over the earth is due to this recurring phenomenon.

Poe did not write "The Raven" until the latter part of his life, spent in various New York sections and finally in Fordham, where Virginia declined away. His most productive poetic period may be traced to the sudden and momentary rise of his

fortunes. Thanks to his connection with *The Broadway Journal* and *Godey's Lady's Book*—the latter a fashion paper for which he conducted the literary column—Poe won prominence in intellectual circles. Despite Virginia's approaching death, he managed to hack away at his facile articles on the Literati, to carry on the several helpful affairs among widows and wives with budding propensities for poetastry, and to continue those public appearances from which he derived, as elsewhere, so tawdry an income. Over this period, as over his whole married life, Mrs. Clemm hovered "like an angel" and as one of the most remarkable women in literary history. Poe's reputation as a candid critic joined his fame as the author of "The Raven" and of the grotesque tales which continued to appear periodically. And now, "Annabel Lee" was written—a poem most of the ladies claimed had been inspired by them. To this last period likewise belong "Ulalume," "The Bells," "Dreamland," "Eldorado," and the prose poem, "Eureka." They were all written after the death of Virginia.

Between the publication of the third and last books of poems lay a gap of fourteen years. During this time, his intense economic activities had called for editorial and associate editorial posts on a succession of periodicals, beginning with *The Southern Literary Messenger* in Richmond. To these he brought a constructive genius of the first order, and the owners for whom he labored were rewarded with swelling subscribers. In the Thirties and Forties, it was a tremendous problem for an American author to find an American publisher. In the absence of an international copyright law, English authors were deliberately pirated. Since they received no royalty, it was cheaper for publishers to issue such editions than to risk their money on unknown Americans. Home authors had to seek a place in periodicals. The rapid growth of magazines and the work performed by authors in helping to found and develop them virtually dates from this era. Poe, like Bryant, Hawthorne, Lowell, Emerson, Whittier—like nearly all writers of his time and many writers since—took a passionate interest in improving the conditions of American authorship. Chafed by compromises forced on him by the

owners of periodicals, he dreamed of a medium he could absolutely control, and planned *The Penn Magazine,* a name superseded by *The Stylus.* The venture was constantly sidetracked by daily hardship, and, when the opening for starting *The Stylus* finally arrived, thanks to the support of a young Illinoisian, Edward Horton Norton Patterson, Poe's health was too far gone. Truth to tell, he used advance sums, sent by his unknown friend, toward final trips of courtship to Boston, Providence and Richmond. In his old home town, he once more sought the hand of his boyhood love, Elmira Royster, now Mrs. Stelton.

It is useless to wonder how much Poe would have added to poetry had he had more time. He also carried the poetic art into his prose tales and "Eureka." Had he had more time, it is probable he would have simply enlarged upon his original course. The strange amalgam of poet, critic and philosopher—the philosopher in "Eureka"—had little concern with the earth. And his adoration of beauty and womanhood never descended from the supernal. His Helens, Eulalies, Lenores, Ulalumes, Annabels, existed in an ideal state. If he describes them at all, they are more compounded of ether than of flesh, and if they have any flesh, it is frail and sickly, and typical of the pervading heroines of Victorian fiction. A Poesque poem was written not alone for the poem's sake; woman herself was diluted to the same purpose. She only breathes through the faint, perfumed longing of the poet. As the lost love predominant from the beginning, both in his life and his art, she became a fascinating angel, an idol, a religion. The Poe ladies died but a century ago, yet time has completely obscured them. They seem thousands of years away and belong, apparently, to a clime and age remote from America or any other human country. The women of ancient history are closer to us, and their poetic memorials infinitely more vital. The old Helenas and Lesbias throb with a sentience so overpowering as to blow away the Lenores and Ulalumes like the shadows they are. Nevertheless, though they haunt not our lives, they still haunt the ear. The lines of the exquisite fantast gave them a shape and movement which will endure after the ever-increasing turmoil of modern

ages has destroyed much hardier poetry. With every one and everything against them, the Poe songs still raise their heads and go on chanting.

Thou wast all that to me, love,
  For which my soul did pine—
A green isle in the sea, love,
  A fountain and a shrine,
All wreathed with fairy fruits and flowers,
  And all the flowers were mine. . . .

And all my days are trances,
  And all my nightly dreams
Are where thy dark eye glances,
  And where thy footstep gleams—
In what ethereal dances,
  By what eternal streams.

For the poems in which, as in "The Raven," the repetend is employed, the most outstanding are "Eulalie," "Eldorado," "Annabel Lee" and "Ulalume." Poe owed his model for this device to old English balladry, as did the English poets. More recently he had found the use of echoes in Coleridge and in Elizabeth Barrett Barrett, to whom he dedicated his last volume. Like any true artist, he had his own way of handling a traditional medium. "Ulalume" is the richest poem of the group. The refrain may be carried too far and offend the ear of devotees to realism. But Ulalume is based on artificial invention, with its Aubers and Weirs and Mount Yaaneks. The poem has its own *raison d'etre.* So far as it has any plot, the music itself comes closest to playing the part. More than any other American poem, "Ulalume" carries out a program of music for the sake of music, and it does so through the subdued tones of the woodwind. The total effect is gained by a subtle diffusion of vowel harmonies, surrounded by an alliterative progression occasionally broken by a ghoulish, archaic word. For the immediate source of "Ulalume," Poe appropriated ideas from a poem on Endymion by his friend, Henry B. Hirst. Once more the master improved on the tyro. "To be a good imitator of Henry B. Hirst," said the condemned plagiarist, "is quite honor

enough for *me*." No one but Poe could have composed the poem as it now stands. It is the most characteristic flowering of his exotic genius.

Among the invocations to women, there is a sonnet to Mrs. Clemm, the sestet of which chants once for all, in direct, natural speech, what he owed her amazingly patient heart:

> My mother, my own mother, who died early,
> Was but the mother of myself; but you
> Are mother to the one I loved so dearly,
> And thus are dearer than the mother I knew
> By that infinity with which my wife
> Was dearer to my soul than its soul-life.

All the way from Frances Allan and Mrs. Stanard to Mrs. Clemm, and finally Mrs. Osgood, Mrs. Whitman, Mrs. Stelton, the strange Southerner must have craved a companion, not of the flesh but of the spirit. His marriage to the unformed Virginia, an affair arranged by Mrs. Clemm and sustained by her as mother to the child of thirteen and the youth of twenty-six—this was a marriage of convenience. Devoted though he was to the innocent invalid, his deepest need stretched toward the maternal hand. His curious adoration of womanhood found its outlet there. In a delicate lyric to an anonymous woman, Poe sang:

> I heed not that my earthly lot
> Had little of Earth in it,
> That years of love have been forgot
> In the hatred of a minute:
> I mourn not that the desolate
> Are happier, sweet, than I,
> But that you sorrow for my fate
> Who am a passer-by.

In this stanza, the poet clearly recognized his transitory relation to love and life. But the proud aristocrat felt his own genius, and, though he used pathetic methods to impress his name on his age and press it into the future, must have felt a conviction that the passer-by was really a man of destiny. The worst doubt revived during the last days, when he was carried

from a Baltimore tavern to the Washington Hospital. He sank into the utmost misery and degradation. As Hervey Allen declares in his biography: "Nothing less heartrending can truthfully be said, than that the death of Israfel was more painful than his life." His last reported words were: "Lord help my poor soul." The melancholy musician passed on in the same year that another melancholy musician passed on. Born like Poe in 1809, Chopin also died in his fortieth year.

Emerson called Poe the jingle-man, and another distinguished American, Henry James, described his work as "valueless verse." Outside of Lowell, it remained for foreign poets and critics to appraise him more justly. No finer appreciation has come to him than Andrew Lang's. Lang struck the keynote of the wisest approach to Poe's poems:

> We shall never appreciate Poe if we keep comparing him to men of stronger and more human natures. . . . He is the singer of rare hours of languor, when the soul is vacant of the pride of life, and inclined to listen, as it were, to the echo of a lyre from behind the hills of death. . . . Some foolish old legend tells of a musician who surpassed all his rivals. His strains were unearthly sad, and ravished the ears of those who listened with a strange melancholy. Yet his viol had but a single string, and the framework was fashioned out of a woman's breast-bone. Poe's verse—the parallel is much in his own taste—resembles that player's minstrelsy. . . .

This is not all. Poe was also a critic and philosopher and the founder of the first esthetic system in America. Inside his prejudices, he was our most stimulating critic, and as a philosopher, he has earned the praise of no less a classicist and master of prose and poetic style than Paul Valéry. Poe's "Eureka" played a dominating force in the shaping of the Frenchman's youth; and he claims furthermore that the fable is the intuitive progenitor of Einstein's Relativity. Valéry quotes a line toward the end of "Eureka"—"Each law of nature depends at all points on all the other laws—" and states:

> This might easily be considered, if not as a formula, at least as the expression of a tendency toward generalized relativity. That

> this tendency approaches recent conceptions becomes evident when one discovers, in the *poem* under discussion, an affirmation of the *symmetrical* and reciprocal relationship of matter, time, space, gravity, and light. I emphasize the word symmetrical, for *it is, in reality, a formal symmetry which is the essential characteristic of Einstein's universe.* Herein lies the beauty of his conception.

Thus Paul Valéry, himself the profoundest enigma in modern French poetry, adds another provocative note to the enigma which was and continues to be, Edgar Allan Poe.

VII

THE INTOXICATED EMERSON

. . . why seek Italy,
Who cannot circumnavigate the sea
Of thoughts and things at home.
Ralph Waldo Emerson.

ON the occasion of the second centennial anniversary of the founding of the little town of Concord, it was natural that the townspeople should call upon a descendant of the original founder to make a public address, and equally natural that he should be called again for the unveiling of the monument commemorating the birth of American independence at Lexington. The September day of 1835 and the April of 1836 introduced a tall, quiet man who was destined to be a leader, not alone of the obscure town, but of the surrounding nation, and who, in describing the effect of "the shot heard round the world," unconsciously prophesied the course of his own career. The "embattled farmers" started the American Revolution; Emerson opened the American Revolution in literature. Not Bryant, our first poet and naturalist, nor Poe, our first esthete, nor Longfellow, poet of the popular, had so deep an effect on later generations. Emerson had deeper roots than any of his antecedents or contemporaries.

Poet-philosopher, naturalist, scientist, pantheist, mystic and patriot, his work reflects not so much the race as its individual voice, and not so much the individual as the one in all and the all in one. Inside his serene domicile, at the heart of the clearest strength, this blue-eyed bard was in touch with all time and all life; and, in the marvelous fragments pieced together, whether in poetry or prose, he slowly created the song we know him by. The man was a poet, no matter what the garment of his spirit. Through most of his long life, he set down first impressions and

emotions in his journals, and out of combinations of these entries, poems, essays and lectures evolved. Unlike Bryant and Poe, his development was gradual. He had none of the single-minded simplicity of the one, nor the exotic brilliance of the other. But if he did not start a "Thanatopsis" in his teens, he gave an early indication of the course ahead of him:

> In twelve days I shall be nineteen years old; which I count a miserable thing. Has any other educated person lived so many years and lost so many days? . . . Look next from the history of my intellect to the history of my heart. A blank, my lord. I have not the kind affections of a pigeon. Ungenerous and selfish, cautious and cold, I yet wish to be romantic; have not sufficient feeling to speak a natural, hearty welcome to a friend or stranger, and yet send abroad wishes and fancies of a friendship with a man I never knew. There is not in the whole wide Universe of God (my relations to Himself I do not understand) one being to whom I am attached with warm and entire devotion. . . .

This is the style of the later Emerson: the problem the boy set down became a leading motive for the next sixty years. His loneliness drove him into constant communion with his private soul and sought solutions through the alleviating medium of letters. Much of the awkwardness of his poetry may be traced to this lifelong difficulty. Not that the slowly growing, infinitely subtle man was devoid of affection. He lacked the temperamental means of letting himself go. In all matters, he had to think several times. The most spontaneous sensation, emotion, passion, had to be weighed before it was committed, even to paper. The deep, fine heart had to consult the intellect before final communication. And what an intellect this was! If the philosopher, seldom complete in himself, interfered with the poet, nevertheless, when they blended, they rendered poems and prose poems of great power and originality. They have a singing eloquence not to be heard in Bryant or Poe. At such times, matter and manner have been caught in an absolute ecstasy. The philosophic poem or poetic philosophy is perfect. One does not care how the perfection was formed, or by what devious hesitations and second thoughts the original fragments were welded.

Technical faults, popular with grammarians and rhetoricians, are apparent on every other page. Such critics have made the most of their opportunities to score against Emerson. Because of his avoidance (it could not have been ignorance) of the rules of syntax in constructing his poems, certain passages have to be read more than once before we dig out their meaning. There are times, surely, when the poet would not have sacrificed a meaning by a closer observance of the rules. Prosodists—another crew of perfectionists—find glaring breaks in Emerson's scansion—an even more risky fault. One barely sets sail along a superbly sustained metre, when a tortured accent or missing foot trips the eye and ear, and a passage has to be re-read for the sake of rhythmic readjustment. Still more irksome is the need of progressing through a series of flying images or aphorisms, some of which refuse to dovetail. Poet and philosopher part, and indulge in a lofty dispute for the rights of priority. The dialectic is dazzling, but the earthy reader is lost in the struggle. Finally, a determination toward complete independence of style often led the poet into fine writing—writing that might have benefited from occasional commonplace or downright banality.

Possibly Emerson's difficulties in communicating with friends were transferred to his written speech. In his isolated profundity, he depended more and more on self-trust and less and less on his trust of others. Somewhere between the two, complete communion is realized. Not that he failed in his interest in others, his interest in the outer world and the Unitarian god in man and man in god. Men who have recorded their memories of him invariably describe the intent interest of his eyes and the smile that hovered about his mouth. Nor can one say he was an introvert who had to refer all matters to himself as a court of last appeal. His own soul sat in that lofty court, but it contained a finely tempered instrument, far in advance of the age, and was therefore the best judge of his life and contacts. Whenever he doubted his powers, he revised his visions, and, in the piecing together of fragments shaping a poem, sometimes the hand shook, the ear miscalculated, or the intellect was too self-reliant. And yet, the independence we

all owe to Emerson, keystone of his character and loadstone attracting his followers, reared itself on the total man, blemishes and all. The roots of this man were entwined in a soil still inexperienced in the nurturing of great artists. The faults of the isolated land with its groping race, still blundering, after the Revolution, toward the conquest of a continent and the building of a democratic society—some of these faults were bound to cling to each successive American. Though Emerson was more than an American—a universalist in the grand manner—the soil caught at his roots and held him. Referring to his belief in the laws of compensation, one is grateful that our soil and this man clung to each other. Without him, the adolescent country would have been set back, instead of forward, a hundred years. A Day Book entry, written in his nineteenth year, stated succinctly: "I dedicate my book to the Spirit of America."

An idealist, mellowed by the shrewdest wit and practicality, the growing Emerson carried out this watchword against the many disappointments he suffered in the American people and their misguided or crumbling leaders. Hand in hand, he was his country's severest critic and most devoted optimist. His national faith was not what a certain Mr. Orage recently dubbed Pollyannaism. Emerson, through the generations of tough pioneers preceding him—most of them clergymen—and through his perpetual contact with Nature at a source from which he never deviated, but to which he brought all his human problems—this Emerson was too hard-headed a Yankee to fly off on airy nothings and baby blue musings. A severer self-critic than Poe, and like Poe, severer in his demands on himself than his demands on other writers, Emerson, despite a Transcendental creed which has been found fallible on several counts, was a realistic individual. If we find too ready an application of compensation to his personal griefs—griefs beginning with the early loss of his two beautiful brothers, his first wife, and, most poignant of all, the magic five-year-old Waldo—we must accept it as his brave recognition of the workings of Nature. That he knew what grief was may be judged from his threnody on the loss of Waldo, the most impassioned in the American

tongue before Whitman's great dirge on Lincoln. By temperament, one may squirm at the entrance into the poem of a long consolatory pæan. One has an uncomfortable notion that the lines beginning, "The deep Heart answered, 'Weepest thou?'" were written at a later period, in a mood of New England didacticism. But this second half has passions of its own. The majestic cadences are irresistible. There is nothing glib in these lines, as there was in most contemporary Christian theology:

> "When frail Nature can no more,
> Then the Spirit strikes the hour:
> My servant Death, with solving rite,
> Pours finite into infinite."

And the consolatory pæan is instinct with scientific facts:

> "Light is light which radiates,
> Blood is blood which circulates,
> Life is life which generates,
> And many-seeming life is one,—
> Wilt thou transfix and make it none?"

The modern skeptic—the skeptic was also present in Emerson—may look askance at the concluding obeisance to the Maker. But even the skeptic, if he can detach his viewpoint long enough to listen to the lines, must be moved by the music, set to the cycles of Nature. Emerson had, after all, no personal definition of the Overlord and, in his maturity, called Him by the pronoun, It.

> Silent rushes the swift Lord
> Through ruined systems still restored,
> Broadsowing, bleak, and void to bless,
> Plants with worlds the wilderness;
> Waters with tears of ancient sorrow
> Apples of Eden ripe to-morrow.
> House and tenant go to ground,
> Lost in God, in Godhead found.

This was a long stride beyond the Calvinism of his forefathers, the immortality in Bryant, or the Unitarianism of his own young manhood. Emerson, grateful though he was for his upbringing, resigned his post as minister because of his dis-

belief in any one ritual. At thirty-one, he wrote: "If I were called upon to charge a young minister, I would say Beware of Tradition: Tradition which embarrasses life and falsifies all teaching. The sermons that I hear are all dead of that ail." Two years later he declared—"Make your own Bible—" and on another occasion: "What a pity that we cannot curse and swear in good society! . . . My page about 'Consistency' would be better written thus: Damn Consistency!" There was no one system in Emerson. And critics who score his seemingly facile acceptance of Fate should be reminded of the last words of his life: "Oh, that beautiful boy!"

Emerson was so reticent with respect to his private life that the most intimate items received but a line in his Journals. "September 14—I was married to Lydia Jackson." He was not, as he claimed, "born cold"; nor did he lack the enthusiasm of his neighbors. He simply went his own way in the surrounding host of prominent men and women and the still greater host he met on his travels abroad, and by whom he was greeted as a peer. Far from accepting an easy optimism, he wrote: "I like the sayers of No better than the sayers of Yes." None the less, the fiery Nietzsche hailed him as a blood-brother. Emerson was merely another of our young American enigmas, as his quiet humor recognized: "Mrs. Helen Bell, it seems, was asked, 'What do you think the Sphinx said to Mr. Emerson?' 'Why,' replied Mrs. Bell, 'the Sphinx probably said to him, You're another.' " He had his own stout opinion in all matters, and patiently listened to the contradictory opinions of mankind. Here is his dry account of the advice doctors gave him after he sprained his foot. "Dr. Henry Bigelow said, 'Splint and absolute rest.' Dr. Russell said, 'Rest, yes; but a splint, no.' Dr. Bartlett said, 'Neither splint nor rest, but go and walk.' Dr. Russell said, 'Pour water on the foot, but it must be warm.' Dr. Jackson said, 'Stand in a trout brook all day.' "

Though the music of Emerson's verse is rarely as smooth as Bryant's or as subtle as Poe's, it is compact of richer tones and a deeper passion. The passion belongs to the soul, rather than the body. Not until Whitman arrived did the body enter

American poetry. But fire abounds all through Emerson, fire kindled through a fearless contact with Nature. The imaginative sweep of his lines kindles the reader more than Bryant's minutely correct observations. "Each And All," one of the earliest poems to praise "the perfect whole," contains remarkable flights of vision:

> The sexton, tolling his bell at noon,
> Deems not that great Napoleon
> Stops his horse, and lists with delight,
> Whilst his files sweep round yon Alpine height.

In this poem, which shows Emerson's lifelong fondness for an irregular octosyllabic couplet, we come upon those many wholehearted brevities embracing the broadest truth. Here is the closing cadence:

> Beauty through my senses stole;
> I yielded myself to the perfect whole.

Beauty, with Emerson, was more than a raven chanting the death of love. He saw and felt in the mass and thrilled to an apprehension of totality. And what a rebel he was!

> I like a church; I like a cowl;
> I love a prophet of the soul;
> And on my heart monastic aisles
> Fall like sweet strains, or pensive smiles;
> Yet not for all his faith can see
> Would I that cowled churchman be.

Emerson may have fancied himself a cold man, but this is not cold poetry. I prefer to call it intoxicated. Still more drunken are the lines of "Mithridates," a mounting song, demanding the poisons of life as an antidote against themselves. This Anacreontic poem gives us the core of Emerson's optimism. In high gusto, it bares the body and spirit to all food and drink, down to the most deadly hemlock and prussic acid. No longer will the poet be "thinly dieted on dew"; he must use and sift the whole world. The robust chant closes with one of his delightful catalogues (later to be overdone by Whitman):

O all you virtues, methods, mights,
Means, appliances, delights,
Reputed wrongs and braggart rights,
Smug routine, and things allowed,
Minorities, things under cloud!
Hither! take me, use me, fill me,
Vein and artery, though you kill me!
God! I will not be an owl,
But sun me in the Capitol.

The very dissonance in the last rhyme, so offensive to nice ears, effectively jumps the image from a minor to a major key.

It is of great interest to trace the indebtedness of other later poets to Emerson. In "Hamatreya," we find a precursor of Edgar Lee Masters' "Spoon River," and the poem beginning:

Where are Elmer, Herman, Bert, Tom and Charley,
The weak of will, the strong of arm, the clown, the boozer, the fighter?
All, all, are sleeping on the hill.

In Emerson's richer poem, we read:

Minott, Lee, Willard, Hosmer, Meriam, Flint,
Possessed the land which rendered to their toil
Hay, corn, roots, hemp, flax, apples, wool, and wood. . . .
Where are these now? Asleep beneath their grounds;
And strangers, fond as they, their furrows plow. . . .

Another contemporary poet, Marianne Moore, shows a love for building an image through rising substances in the line: "hemp, rye, flax, horses, platinum, timber and fur." It does not follow that Masters and Miss Moore plagiarized Emerson, but that each, along with many other poets since Whitman, owe part of their inspiration to the Concord bard. He is in the blood of every American original.

"The Humble-Bee" is not alone noteworthy for its wit and wisdom, but as a distinct foreshadowing of the genius of Emily Dickinson. The immortal Emily had a similar love of bees, and of an iconoclastic treatment of crowding images.

Burly, dozing humble-bee,
Where thou art is clime for me.
Let them sail for Porto Rique,

Far-off heats through seas to seek;
I will follow thee alone,
Thou animated torrid-zone!—

The hermit of Amherst might have signed these lines with their striking adjectives, the reckless invention of "clime" and "Porto Rique," the phrase, "thou animated torrid-zone," and such later epithets as "Sailor of the atmosphere," "Epicurean of June," "Yellow-breeched philosopher."

Moving in the grandeur of painted and sounding scene is "The Snow-Storm." Bryant was usually content to observe and describe Nature accurately. Emerson's temperament called for still more, and his single lines for some one word or phrase to lift a poem out of the commonplace. He believed that single lines should be poems in themselves—an ideal he sometimes carried too far. But "The Snow-Storm" is free of exaggeration. Here the occasional strange word lifts the poem from sight into vision, from fancy into imagination. Such words are italicized in the following lines:

Announced by all the *trumpets* of the sky. . . .
In a tumultuous *privacy* of storm. . . .
Come see the north wind's *masonry*. . . .
A *swan-like* form invests the hidden thorn. . . .
The *frolic architecture* of the snow. . . .

It is worth repeating that Emerson's reticence as a man never curbed his poetry. He entrusted the most hidden confidences to paper, and sang out in a flood of warm cadences. The loneliness of the poet amidst a material civilization is expressed in "Woodnotes—I":

For this present, hard
Is the fortune of the bard,
Born out of time. . . .

He is most at peace in natural surroundings:

Cæsar of his leafy Rome,
There the poet is at home.

But Emerson, at the heart of his Concord retreat, was deeply stirred by a total concern, material and spiritual, for his coun-

try's welfare. He received little or no public return for his interest: his books had no immediate sale, and the average critic was antagonistic. Though inclined to agree with the critics, he remarked fairly early: "The literary man in this country has no critic—" an historic comment. On the other hand, praise moved him even less. Nor did he trust overmuch in benefits conferred by books. "I am sure of this, that by going much alone a man will get more of a noble courage in thought and word than from all the wisdom that is in the books." And he summed up artist and critic: "The borer on our peach trees bores that she may deposit an egg: but the borer into theories and institutions and books bores that he may bore." Emerson refused to cloister himself in the ivory tower of an art for art's sake, even though "eager, solicitous, hungry, rabid, busy-bodied America attempting many things" was challenged: "speed and fever are never greatness." The silent man chose a quieter course. In "Woodnotes—II":

> Whoso walketh in solitude,
> And inhabiteth the wood,
> Choosing light, wave, rock, and bird,
> Before the money-loving herd,
> Into that forester shall pass,
> From these companions, power and grace.

The last two substantives unconsciously describe the abiding traits of the author himself. And there is prophecy in—

> Grave, chaste, contented, though retired,
> And of all other men desired—

for his modest home became the haven of men from all over the earth. The philosophy of acceptance predominates over any philosophy of escape. If he preferred the country to the town, he preferred it wisely, and because he beheld therein the movement of Pantheism and of modern evolution in a dynamic pageantry and symmetry:

> Onward and on, the eternal Pan,
> Who layeth the world's incessant plan,
> Halteth never in one shape,

But forever doth escape.
Like wave or flame, into new forms
Of gem, and air, of plants, and worms. . . .
Alike to him the better, the worse,—
The glowing angel, the outcast corse. . . .
He is the heart of every creature;
He is the meaning of each feature;
And his mind is the sky,
Than all it holds more deep, more high.

"Woodnotes I and II" are among the longest and most sustained of Emerson's ecstatic hymns. They are a survey of all he felt, thought and believed, and, some critic would add, the only thing missing is a foot in the penultimate line.

A number of the shorter, more cryptic poems, have an additional value in the inspiration and form they provided for the poets of the later free verse movement—beginning, oddly enough, with Stephen Crane. Crane might have written the famous little fable of the mountain and the squirrel, as might some of the comedians of the present era. In other fables, a single line again expresses the whole mood of a poem, as in Forbearance: "Hast thou named all the birds without a gun?" In this compressed economy, we discover one of the virtues of the recent Imagistic movement.

Emerson wrote a number of love poems, but they are mostly philosophical and cosmic, as in "Initial, Dæmonic, And Celestial Love," or didactic, as in "Give All To Love." A lyric to Ellen, his first wife, and one "To Eva," have sensual qualities unusual in early American poetry. Emerson's indebtedness to the Persians, especially his favorite Hafiz, accounts for this vein. It remained for Whitman to address women with the full passion of the male. Early New Englanders must have been excellent lovers, but their serenades reveal mere hints of the complete man. But Emerson's love poems have much more blood than Poe's. "The Romany Girl" is proof of this. Her attack on the "pale Northern girls," shrewdly detects the gypsy lurking behind the social mask of Puritan ladies. The poem is delightfully outspoken.

Emerson confessed his inability to let himself go: "Even for

those whom I really love I have not animal spirits." Though he lived to seventy-nine, he was hampered by a lack of physical vitality; like Bryant, he had to conserve his energies from youth onward. One of his clean-cut lyrics alludes to the tragic dilemma:

> They brought me rubies from the mine,
> And held them to the sun;
> I said, they are drops of frozen wine
> From Eden's vats that run.
>
> I looked again,—I thought them hearts
> Of friends to friends unknown;
> Tides that should warm each neighboring life
> Are locked in sparkling stone.
>
> But fire to thaw that ruddy snow,
> To break enchanted ice,
> And give love's scarlet tides to flow,—
> When shall that sun arise?

Though snow is the theme of this poem, it was written with fire, as were most of the songs of this lonely lover. If he found it impossible to embrace his many friends on both sides of the Atlantic, with Carlyle looming largest and longest, the profoundest warmth rises from his singing poems and prose. It has the power to kindle a supreme love in the reader, a love not alone for the poet (something he never courted), but a love of Nature, of mankind, of country, of liberty, and of all the graces. There is physical gusto in the deep-bellied rhythms of the poem to Bacchus. Emerson did not drink because he could not afford Longfellow's plutocratic cellar. In imbibing a universal wine, he fell drunk without drinking:

> Bring me wine, but wine which never grew
> In the belly of the grape,
> Or grew on vine whose tap-roots, reaching through
> Under the Andes to the Cape,
> Suffered no savour of the earth to scape.

Under prohibition, our race has taken to surreptitious drink with the utmost bravado. But there is no poet among us whose drunken poems equal Emerson's. He was not in love with

forms or exhibitions, but with the whole of life. The most prevalent note, no matter what the theme or occasion, is saturated with intoxication. Not even the canny philosopher could restrain the seer and bard, nor the demands of traditional poetry hem in the free rhythm of their speech. Emerson's poetry was the first rebellion against British poetry, and the harbinger of the general Revolution beginning with Whitman. Here is the call to which Walt responded, and which he handed on to future Americans:

> Thy trivial harp will never please
> Or fill my craving ear;
> Its chords should ring as blows the breeze,
> Free, peremptory, clear.
> No jingling serenader's art,
> Nor tinkle of piano strings,
> Can make the wild blood start
> In its mystic springs.
> The kingly bard
> Must smite the chords rudely and hard,
> As with hammer or with mace;
> That they may render back
> Artful thunder, which conveys
> Secrets of the solar track,
> Sparks of the supersolar blaze.

These are the opening lines of Merlin. In the short poem, "Culture," Emerson again called for a man like Whitman, who

> . . . to his native centre fast,
> Shall into Future fuse the Past,
> And the world's flowing fates in his own mould cast.

The first "Leaves Of Grass," 1855, responded to the call, and Emerson, never given to quick praise, was the first man to acclaim the new giant. In his response to the copy sent by Whitman—the highest and truest praise Walt ever received—the Concord Olympian recognized part of himself in the younger poet. The magnificent tone of the famous letter, with its "I hail you at the beginning of a great career," is astonishing in view of Emerson's dicta concerning his neighbors, or for that matter, most of the English poets.

Poe was the jingle-man and Shelley hardly more. Tennyson was a "beautiful half of a poet," and it took the pantheistic Wordsworth some time to appeal to Emerson. "Mr. Coleridge has thrown many more truths into circulation; Mr. Southey never one." He approved of Bryant's love of Nature—"If we believed no poet survived on the planet, nature would be tedious." To this he added: "But who cares to see a poem of Bryant's. . . . The mind of the race has taken another direction,—Property." For his Cambridge friends, Longfellow, Lowell, Holmes, he had little enthusiasm; nor for the poetic prose of Hawthorne. He believed in his mad, Transcendental disciple, Jones Very, and sent his poems to Carlyle and Wordsworth. In Thoreau, obviously, he found a good deal of himself: "I am very familiar with all his thoughts, they are my own quite originally drest." And Thoreau was the one man he addressed by his Christian name. Henry led him outdoors. Most Americans disappointed him: "But in America I grieve to miss the strong black blood of the English race: ours is a pale, diluted stream. . . . Every man an imperfect specimen; respectable, not valid." For the strength he demanded, he turned to Goethe. And to the classics. Like most poets, Emerson was a biased critic—but frankly so. Malice never entered his head. Toward his own fame, he was skeptical. After a visit to the Tri-Cities, he concluded: "In Rock Island I am advertised as 'the Celebrated Metaphysician,' in Davenport as 'the Essayist and Poet.'" Moline, apparently, said nothing.

Even though Emerson was moved most by men of his own calibre, he, like Whitman, despised disciples. In a memorable passage, akin to a poem of Walt's, he declared:

> I have been writing and speaking what were once called novelties, for twenty-five or thirty years, and have not now one disciple. Why? Not that what I said was not true; not that it has not found intelligent receivers; but because it did not go from any wish in me to bring men to me, but to themselves. . . . This is my boast that I have no school follower. I should account it a measure of the impurity of insight, if it did not create independence.

Later, Whitman chanted to the future originals:

> With time and space I him dilate and fuse the immortal laws,
> To make himself by them the law unto himself.

If Emerson despaired of his contemporaries, or of the backwardness of his people, it was not due to any failure in his vision. Like Whitman, he felt that "the main things" were still to come, out of America. In one of the longest and best of his poems, "May-Day," there is a pæan to Spring which answers the doubters and cynics:

> Why chidest thou the tardy Spring?
> The hardy bunting does not chide;
> The blackbirds make the maples ring
> With social cheer and jubilee;
> The redwing flutes his *o-ka-lee,*
> The robins know the melting snow;
> The sparrow meek, prophetic-eyed,
> Her nest beside the snow-drift weaves,
> Secure the osier yet will hide
> Her callow brood in mantling leaves;
> And thou, by science all undone,
> Why only must thy reason fail
> To see the southing of the sun?

These lines were written some years ago, but we are still "by science all undone." They might serve an anesthetic, as well as esthetic purpose, since Emerson included science in his scheme of things. "May-Day," composed throughout in his jocund octosyllabics, is his great spring poem on the pageantry of Nature. Again, wine is one of the leading images. The average spring poem is a tuneful lay for which one would like to destroy the race of poetasters. This ode is a bacchanalian symphony irresistible in its drunken joy.

It remains to be repeated that Emerson, far from trying to escape from mankind into Nature, felt the struggle of his own race more keenly than any writer of his time. Child of the Revolution in his Concord hymn, he anticipated the Civil War by twenty years in an address on the emancipation of the negro. Though Whittier is generally considered the poet of anti-slavery,

Emerson really led his generation. In 1861, at a meeting attended by Lincoln, the Concordian delivered an Emancipation address in Washington. Two years later, at the age of sixty, he read his stirring "Boston Hymn" in Music Hall. This call to universal liberty contains such quatrains as—

> God said, I am tired of kings,
> I suffer them no more;
> Up to my ear the morning brings
> The outrage of the poor. . . .
>
> I will divide my goods;
> Call in the wretch and slave:
> None shall rule but the humble,
> And none but Toil shall have. . . .

One need hardly indicate the communistic note in this chant. Nor is this the theory of a man comfortably isolated in the woods. In 1851, Emerson greeted the Fugitive Slave Law with the speech: "This filthy enactment was made in the nineteenth century, by people who could read and write. I will not obey it, by God." During the same year, he commented on the Women's Convention in Worcester: "I think that as long as they have not equal rights of property and right of voting they are not on the right footing." Always in the forefront where freedom was concerned, he summed up his demand for the complete, independent son of Nature: "I think a man should compare advantageously with a river, with an oak, with a mountain, endless flow, expansion, and grit."

Emerson was an artist and more. While Bryant, fifty years at the heart of public affairs, refused to permit his country to enter his poetry, Emerson, like Whittier, Lowell and Whitman, waded deep into the Civil War with impassioned tongue and pen. What is a poet if he be not a man first of all? This man called himself cold. If so, how could he have written his chant on the black race: "Voluntaries"? If he was a blind optimist, how could he have seen the evils of his own race so clearly and have stood before people without hesitancy, shy though he was, launching drastic charges against his countrymen and their misleaders? In his seventy-fifth year, in the grand Old South

Church, he delivered his opinion of American leaders in "The Fortune Of The Republic." The frail old gentleman was anything but complimentary.

But the hour of departure had arrived. He had already sung his swan-song in "Terminus":

> It is time to be old,
> To take in sail:—
> The god of bounds,
> Who sets to seas a shore,
> Came to me in his fatal rounds,
> And said: "No more. . . ."

For epitaph, he might have applied to himself his poem, "Experience," where the lords of life, "like and unlike," passed by, while the "little man, least of all, walked about with puzzled look."

> Him by the hand dear Nature took,
> Dearest Nature, strong and kind,
> Whispered, "Darling, never mind!
> To-morrow they will wear another face,
> The founder thou; these are thy race!"

Two years after the Civil War, his book, "May-Day," appeared. According to John Burroughs, Emerson mailed "fifty copies to friends; one of them went to Walt Whitman. I saw it the day it came. It was in a white dress (silk, I think); very beautiful."

VIII

A RUSTIC QUAKER GOES TO WAR

Praise and thanks for an honest man!
Glory to God for the Puritan!
John Greenleaf Whittier.

JOHN GREENLEAF WHITTIER, oldest of poets among the Yankee patriarchs, lived to his eighty-fifth year—one beyond Bryant and six beyond Emerson. A bachelor all his days, whereas Emerson, Longfellow and Lowell married twice and outlived their wives, Whittier pursued the most devoutly simple life: a career devoted to the Quaker faith, his country, freedom, anti-slavery, labor and primitive Nature. The other poets of the New England renascence were aristocrats by comparison. Like Robert Burns, the poet who led him to poetry, Whittier came out of the poorest class and sought his education in men, rather than books. On his eightieth birthday, he read aloud these lines of his own:

Scotland shall flourish while each peasant learns
The psalms of David and songs of Burns.

Inheriting the saintly qualities of John Woolman, father of American Quakerhood, Whittier was aroused by injustice in any form. From the persecution of the Quakers by the Calvinists, to the slavery of the contemporary negro, his peaceful spirit waged war in poetic oratory, composed of affective simplicity. More than any other poet of his era, he espoused the underdog, and his most antagonistic speech was tempered with kindliness. Though an intimate of Garrison's, Whittier had hoped to see slavery abolished through peaceful channels. When these proved inconclusive, he seized bellicose measures with the fervor of an ardent Abolitionist, but without losing sight of his God as the final mediator. There are curious parallels in the careers of

Whittier and Longfellow. They were born in the same year and grew up with the Abolitionist leaders, Garrison and Sumner. Longfellow was close to Sumner throughout the latter's tempestuous campaign, but was never so deeply stirred by the threats of the country's upheaval as his kinship with the Senator might have warranted. Outside of the mild series of slavery poems he wrote at sea, he avoided the war, as he did most contemporary action. The author of "Evangeline" came out of foreign books, and to books he returned. Whittier came out of people nearest the soil, and felt its tremors more intimately than any other poet before Whitman.

Whittier's poetry is autobiographical. No man ever wrote more directly from his own experience. Though the bulk of his work begins to sound antiquated, the best of it is destined to survive, and to survive beyond the more popular works of his day or those more expert technically. His simplicity of character militated against any mastery of broader or subtler poetic media. He fell behind Poe and Longfellow in the manner of his writing. But in the matter, he outdistanced both, for he devoted himself to the things and themes of this life, and not to some nebulous lost love or sentimental transcriptions of foreign or domestic tales. Like Bryant, he was steeped in the native soil. Bryant's eye and ear were clearer and his hand more certain; but Whittier's instrument had more stops. He was not alone moved by Nature and immortality, but by the human race as well. Despite the fate to which the bulk of his work has succumbed, enough remains to give him a secure place in the American future.

It is always unfortunate that a man involved in the timely problems of his race is destined to pale in the estimation of later generations. Unless he express his passion with respect to a timeless background, the questions uppermost during his life lose interest as soon as they have been solved. Once the Civil War had solved, or apparently solved, the negro question, the passions of the race turned to the reconstruction of a more closely knit Union, and to the expanding demands of a greater commercialism. Whittier's anti-slavery poems and songs of

labor were taken for granted after hostilities ceased. With the dawn of reconstruction, the country developed more rapidly, along certain lines, than any other in history. These lines had less and less to do with the idealistic spirit animating Whittier's New England. The Quaker poet, like most members of his generation, was doomed to vanish—for awhile at least. Unless one has a keen heart and conscience for forms of slavery akin to those of the past, one has to put on historical glasses to revive the passion injustice aroused in Whittier. So long as injustice is prevalent anywhere—and it will doubtless survive in some form or other so long as humanity exists—the horrors which drove Garrison, Sumner and Whittier into frenzied outbreaks must have an everlasting value. Whittier was not the poet to hew his lines in Miltonic stone. He was too uncouth an artist to give an immortal shape to the passion stirring his supremely compassionate nature. That most of his work was flung off to meet the need we call occasional, may be found in "The Tent On The Beach":

> And one there was, a dreamer born,
> Who, with a mission to fulfill,
> Had left the Muses' haunts to turn
> The crank of an opinion-mill,
> Making his rustic reed of song
> A weapon in the war with wrong. . . .

None the less, his ear was still lured by poetry: the same poem contains the refrain:

> For while he wrought with strenuous will
> The work his hands had found to do,
> He heard the fitful music still
> Of winds that out of dreamland blew.
> The din about him could not drown
> What the strange voices whispered down. . . .

One of Whittier's poems brought a visit from Garrison. Later, the fiery rebel summoned him to join the Abolitionists, and the Quaker responded with the full ardor of his inner light. He was a contributor to Garrison's *The Liberator*, and signed the Anti-Slavery Declaration. Thirty years later, Whittier de-

clared: "I am not insensible to literary reputation; I love, perhaps too well, the praise and good will of my fellow men; but I set a higher value to my name appended to the Anti-Slavery Declaration of 1833, than on the title-page of any book." The cause he espoused was by no means popular, even in Massachusetts. He had seen a mob dragging Garrison, with a rope around his neck, through Boston highways, and was himself publicly attacked at a meeting in Concord. Though warfare threatened his deepest principles, he did not shirk the responsibility of his opinions. When the war broke out, he was stricken with sorrow, but accepted the inescapable need of brotherly bloodshed. Differences of conduct alienated the violent Garrison—a wound the poet suffered in silence. Garrison demanded the most drastic reforms. If the Bible or the Church, the Constitution, or the Union, opposed anti-slavery, then away with them all and death to the Union! If the impression has been given that Whittier was altogether milder than his friend, it will be corrected by reading his poems to Garrison and Sumner, and such poems as "The Slave-Ships," "The Hunters Of Men," "Clerical Oppressors," "The Farewell Of A Virginia Slave Mother," "Massachusetts To Virginia," "The Sentence Of John L. Brown," "Yorktown and A Sabbath Scene."

"The Hunters Of Men" swings along to the footfall of horses:

> Have ye heard of our hunting, o'er mountain and glen,
> Through cane-brake and forest,—the hunting of men?
> The lords of our land to this hunting have gone,
> As the fox-hunter follows the sound of the horn. . . .

"Clerical Oppressors" is an outraged address to God and an attack on the clergy who ignored the cries of the oppressed:

> Pilate and Herod, friends!
> Chief priests and rulers, as of old, combine!
> Just God and holy! is that church, which lends
> Strength to the spoiler, thine?

"The Sentence Of John L. Brown," occasioned by the death imposed by South Carolina on a white man who married a negress to free her from slavery, refers to the body as "this blossom of

the gallows tree!" "Yorktown" draws a contrast between the battlefield where freedom was won by Washington and the self-same soil where "the slave still toils his life away." Most vivid and horrible is "A Sabbath Scene," the tale of a negress who sought refuge from her master in a church, only to be handed over to him by the priest. The declaration of war was greeted by the Quaker in "Thy Will Be Done," and the Amendment abolishing slavery, with "Laus Deo!" His gallantry to the foe was attested by the popular jingle, "Barbara Frietchie."

It is apparent that the war poems appealed to the public conscience through the employment of the simplest speech, metres and rhymes. The poems do not rate very high as poetry; one turns from them to things written without reference to an occasion. In this search for pure poetry, one reverts, strangely enough, to what is clearly Whittier's masterpiece and the finest long poem in the American speech of his time. So it seems to one surprised student in his endeavor to review the march of our poetry. "Snow-Bound" was the most popular of Whittier's poems during his lifetime, and it deserves popularity now in the best sense of the much-abused word.

Whittier wrote the poem in his fifty-seventh year. He was the slowest of Americans in developing a technical instrument for his poetic gift. If art, as some one has said, did more for Poe than Nature, the reverse may be said of the Quaker. Of his imperfections and general lack of training, he was so aware that he wished to drown his early poems and to kill Mogg Megone all over again. He began "Snow-Bound" after the problems of slavery had been well nigh solved and the war was nearly at an end. He could now turn from some hot-blooded impulse to poetry requiring a sustained effort. As he addressed the editors of *The Atlantic Monthly:* "I hope I am correcting a little of the bad grammar and rhythmical blunders which have so long annoyed Harvard graduates." Whatever the graduates thought, "Snow-Bound" and "The Tent On The Beach" quickly commended themselves to the people of his own class. He earned ten thousand dollars on the first edition of "Snow-Bound," and twenty thousand copies of "The Tent" were sold.

"The swindle is awful," wrote Whittier; "Barnum is a saint to me." His unexpected success gave him the leisure essential to the growth of an artist.

"Snow-Bound," more than any other New England idyl, renders a heartily realistic picture of a Northern interior in midwinter. The poem is prefaced by a quotation from Emerson's "The Snow Storm," with its powerful description of the farm house inmates walled inside a "tumultuous privacy." Snow, ever one of the great New England themes, has fascinated her poets all the way from Bryant to Frost. Whittier's masterpiece, autobiographical throughout, might serve, had he written nothing else, as the narrative of his whole life, ideals and environment. The poem is finely wrought, the plot well sustained, and the successive stanzas dovetail without apparent effort. While the poet is relating his own story, he is disclosing the common experience of his neighbors and the interior lives of any peasant class in wintry countries. Near the close of the idyl, reference is made in retrospect to "these Flemish pictures of old days." Though Whittier has the Flemish painters' unerring instinct for detail, "Snow-Bound," with its simple Quaker faith, could only have been composed in Puritan soil. Many a Flemish interior is Rabelaisian by contrast.

Like a simple Pagan dramatist, Whittier marshals the leading characters who shared the home of his youth: his father, mother, brother, two sisters, unmarried uncle and aunt, and the village schoolmaster who boarded with the family. The only other person from the outer world is the mysterious visitor, Harriet Livermore, with whom the poet was shyly in love. One notes the natural handling of the popular octosyllabic couplets, the discreet rhymes, the conversational tone of the speech—a Yankee speech anticipating the poetic methods of Robert Frost. From the introductory reference to the outer December world, with its brevity of sun, its "hills of gray," the last nightly chores among the cattle, the interest shifts to the cheerful indoor prison from where

> We looked upon a world unknown,
> On nothing we could call our own. . . .

No cloud above, no earth below,—
A universe of sky and snow!

The first human to rouse himself is the father—"Boys, a path!" The lads cut "the solid whiteness through" to the barn where the cattle are imprisoned. How logical is the movement from natural cause to effect, and how authentic the folk-like description of the horse thrusting "his long head out," the cock leading forth his "speckled harem," the oxen looking their "mild reproach of hunger." Through the new day, the growing tempest obliterates further old sights and sounds, and the humans fortify themselves with fellowship and warmth around the traditional hearth:

. . . the old, rude-furnished room
Burst, flower-like, into rosy bloom.

The family gather about the glow which touches the inevitable dog and cat, the mug of cider, the baking apples, the basket of nuts "from brown October's wood." Reflecting on the departure from the circle of all but himself and one brother, the poet interpolates his consolatory faith in the meeting again hereafter:

. . . Life is ever lord of Death,
And Love can never lose its own!

After this ghostly, cheerful prelude, the spectres take on flesh and life. In the midst of fireplace stories and schoolbooks read aloud, the note of anti-slavery appears at the heart of the Quaker faith. The father is again the leader, and we hear his reminiscences among the earlier trappers and Indians: "tales of witchcraft old" and adventures on land and sea. The mother, turning her wheel,

Told how the Indian hordes came down
At midnight on Cocheco town,
And how her own great-uncle bore
His cruel scalp-mark to four-score.

How effectively her "fitting phrase" recalls "the common unrhymed poetry of simple life and country ways," and draws the

background of the New England past, with details of her childhood roaming among woods, fields and brooks, hawks and loons, fishes and flowers. It is she who reads aloud from old Quaker chronicles teaching the simple life of sacrifice and martyrdom. By contrast, with her, the uncle is "innocent of books." The "guileless childlike man" carries the children off into "moons and tides," interprets "many an occult hint and sign," and "like Apollonius," clarifies the meanings of eagle's eggs, partridge, mink, woodchuck, muskrat and squirrel--

> Strong only on his native grounds,
> The little world of sights and sounds
> Whose girdle was the parish bounds . . .

Tenderness is one of the rarest notes in American poetry, and the tenderness the maiden aunt receives from Whittier is positively exquisite:

> The sweetest woman ever Fate
> Perverse denied a household mate,
> Who, lonely, homeless, not the less
> Found peace in love's unselfishness. . . .

Something of the poet's lifelong loneliness touches her as "she called up her girlhood memories—"

> Weaving through all the poor details
> And homespun warp of circumstance
> A golden woof-thread of romance. . . .
> Through years of toil and soil and care,
> From glossy tress to thin gray hair,
> All unprofaned she held apart
> The virgin fancies of the heart.

A sketch of the elder sister follows: melancholy strokes and tints limning the life of a "heart sore-tried." Then comes the household pet, the younger sister, who—

> With me one little year ago:—
> The chill weight of the winter snow
> For months upon her grave has lain. . . .

A delicate reminiscence ensues: winter is penetrated by the June places they walked together along the countryside. Again and

again, the surrounding snow image is melted by tender memories. Though the aging poet now finds "a loss in all familiar things," he looks forward to the time "when the sunset gates unbar," and give him the welcome of her hand, "white against the evening star."

With the entrance of their boarder, the village schoolmaster, a lustier note intervenes, crossgrained with humor and ruddier flesh tones. This man is a type of the old universalist, a Jack-of-all-trades at home everywhere, and a leader in action as well as thought. He "peddled wares from town to town," took the lead in sleigh-rides, rustic parties, games, "and gave his scholarship a homely turn."

> And little seemed at best the odds
> 'Twixt Yankee pedlar and old gods . . .
> And dread Olympus at his will
> Became a huckleberry hill. . . .

One sighs involuntarily for an application of such a method among teachers and critics with whom greater mystification, rather than simplification, is the rule of scholarly procedure. And this schoolmaster is a man of the future, who girds his apostles to strike for freedom, to "uplift the black and white alike," destroy the caste system, and unite North and South under a common flag,

> And, side by side in labor's free
> And unresentful rivalry,
> Harvest the fields wherein they fought.

Against this masculine country character, the poet introduces the exotic aristocrat, Miss Livermore, and writes with a becoming subtlety strange to his accustomed art. Significantly, she receives the longest full-length portrait, for this "not unfeared, half-welcome guest" is the heroine of the humble autobiography—

> Rebuking with her cultured phrase
> Our homeliness of words and ways.

In keeping with her nature, the palette grows richer and the strokes bolder:

A woman tropical, intense
In thought and act, in soul and sense,
She blended in a like degree,
The vixen and the devotee . . .
Presaging ill to him whom Fate
Condemned to share her love or hate.

She had, apparently, long since left Whittier's life for a round of worldly travels to Europe, Smyrna, Malta, Jerusalem, Lebanon. The poet follows a soaring line of conjecture, and, shaking his head over the mystery, can only conclude:

Nor is it given us to discern
  What threads the fatal sisters spun,
  Through what ancestral years has run
The sorrow with the woman born,
What forged her cruel chain of moods,
What set her feet in solitudes,
  And held the love within her mute . . .

Consigning her to the care of Providence, Whittier returns to the "great logs, crumbling low," and "the bull's-eye watch" pointing "its black hand to the hour of nine." The uncle knocks the ashes from his pipe, and the mother speaks her accustomed prayer, not alone for the inmates, but for the outer world,

That none might lack, that bitter night,
For bread and clothing, warmth and light.

The gallery complete, and the day and night over, bedtime follows. The remainder of the quietly moving idyl is devoted to the new day, the breaking of the drifted roads by teamsters and their youthful recruits. Another week goes by, and the inmates have further recourse in books, the Almanac, in poetry, "or good or bad." Then comes the village carrier with the village papers. Communication with the great world is resumed:

Welcome to us its week-old news,
Its corner for the rustic Muse,
  Its monthly gauge of snow and rain,
Its record, mingling in a breath
The wedding bell and dirge of death . . .

The closing stanzas ask the "Angel of the backward look" to "shut down and clasp the heavy lids" of the past. Aware of the ever-nearing night of his own days, the Quaker concludes:

> The traveler owns the grateful sense
> Of sweetness near, he knows not whence,
> And, pausing, takes with forehead bare
> The benediction of the air.

That this poem is as vital now as it was seventy years ago is due to its fidelity to Whittier's life and environment and to the spontaneity of the language. Fault may be found with the paucity of rhymes and the prosaic tone of an occasional line. It is doubtless not a great poem; but a greater American poem had not yet appeared. Later poets might learn to write more skillfully, but none would render a completer version of their lives and times. "Snow-Bound" is a New England classic, and as such has earned for its author a life among our immortal poets.

Whittier wrote a number of other ballads and narratives, but none are comparable with "Snow-Bound." It is difficult to believe in the absurd plot of "Maud Muller." The naïveté of the girl can only be equaled by the naïveté of the judge. Without forewarning, he weds "a wife of richest dower" in one couplet and sighs for Maud in the next, whereas she weds a man "unlearned and poor" and sighs quite as hard for the judge. This ballad contains the famous couplet:

> For of all sad words of tongue or pen,
> The saddest are these: "It might have been!"

The "Harvard graduates" must have groaned at the rhyme, but it seems to have survived their misery. In truth, Whittier's homespun art lacked the richness essential to the composition of more than one distinguished narrative. How often he goes on prating after the divine afflatus has exhausted itself. His ballads move among too many things outside the parish—German, Scotch, Irish, Danish, Helenic, Persian and others. He was more at home among racial legends, Colonial, Indian and witchcraft. Even here, the historically minded Longfellow surpassed him.

The regularity of Whittier's heartbeat may be heard in "Autumn Thoughts":

> Gone hath the Spring, with all its flowers,
> And gone the Summer's pomp and show,
> And Autumn, in his leafless bowers,
> Is waiting for the Winter's snow.

So complete a cycle misses the "surprise" Emerson demanded of a poet. Outside of "Snow-Bound," portions of "The Tent On The Beach," the Abolition and Labor groups, and personal poems like "Ichabod," one cannot read much of Whittier at one sitting. His was an extraordinarily kindly spirit, and his muse a creature of the heart and little of the head. His poetic ambition reveals itself in—

> To paint, forgetful of the tricks of art,
> With pencil dipped alone in colors of the heart.

Only the general inexperience of the race, a handicap he inherited with most of his contemporaries, could have made him overlook the indissoluble union between a man and his art. At the same time, he had an ardent faith in the union of political bodies, of North and South, of man to man. Shoemakers, fishermen, lumbermen, shipbuilders, drovers—each worker receives a warm song. His child-like belief in equality is chanted through "The Poor Voter On Election Day":

> The proudest now is but my peer,
> The highest not more high;
> To-day, of all the weary year,
> A king of men am I.
> To-day alike are great and small,
> The nameless and the known;
> My palace is the people's hall,
> The ballot-box my throne!

There is also an "After Election," in which his faith in the ballot's efficacy remains unchallenged.

If hope is the principal food of the poor, we can see how truly Whittier, throughout his long life, was "the barefoot boy" himself. Born the same year as the sentimental Longfellow and

dying with the prophetic Whitman, he remained devoutly cheerful through eighty-five years. His rustic genius had no use for a poem "unconsecrated to religion and humanity." Any other aim would have been "a criminal waste of life." He revered Emerson profoundly, and was saddened when the seer said to him: "If there is a future life for us, it is well; if there is not, it is well also." The inner light of the Quaker taught Whittier to look for the blessing of man as the greatest possible good. His religious hymns, homely rhymes, poetic preaching, found their way to the men and women of his own kind and to men and women in high governmental places. On his eightieth birthday, he received a portfolio setting forth the signatures of "59 United States Senators, the entire bench of the Supreme Court . . . Speaker Carlisle of the House of Representatives, and 330 members of the House . . . along with the names of many distinguished citizens. . . ." Like his great contemporary, Lincoln, Whittier was "a man of the people." A few weeks before his death, he addressed Oliver Wendell Holmes in the farewell poem:

> The hour draws near, howe'er delayed and late,
> When at the Eternal Gate
> We leave the words and works we call our own,
> And lift void hands alone
>
> For love to fill. Our nakedness of soul
> Brings to that Gate no toll;
> Giftless we come to Him, who all things gives,
> And live because He lives.

IX

THE FALLEN PRINCE OF POPULARITY

Am I a king, that I should call my own
This splendid ebon throne?
Henry Wadsworth Longfellow.

FROM the publication of his first book of poems in 1839 to his peaceful death in Craigie House, Longfellow was the reigning popular poet of Nineteenth Century America. At fifty, less than twenty years after "Voices Of The Night" appeared, the prolific sentimentalist looked back upon a record of sales aggregating three hundred thousand copies. Considering the population of the times and the average number of readers who handle each copy of a book sold on the stalls, one may assume that every American read Longfellow, and most of them knew most of him by heart. Never before or since has an American poet been endowed by Nature with so genial a faculty for catching the fancy of the children of all ages. The supreme ease through which he wooed the popular heart was only equaled by the ease through which that organ succumbed. There are many ways of accounting for his phenomenal luck, ways that also account for the decline in which his name is now shrouded. Of all the poets of the New England renascence, Longfellow is held in the greatest derision. The merest reference to his name elicits a patronizing smile or contemptuous epithet. A man who attempts the slightest praise of the poet risks the pillory. And yet, there are still some poems of Longfellow's worthy of incurring the risk.

In one of the five flights of his "Birds Of Passage," he unconsciously provided the text for the rise and fall of his popularity. Characteristically, the poem is called, "Vox Populi," and its events take place in the remotest regions:

When Mazárvan the Magician
  Journeyed westward through Cathay,
Nothing heard he but the praises
  Of Badoura on his way.

But the lessening rumor ended
  When he came to Khaledan,
There the folk were talking only
  Of Prince Camaralzaman.

So it happens with the poets:
  Every province hath its own;
Camaralzaman is famous
  Where Badoura is unknown.

Since every age and province hath its own, popular poets of to-day have interred Badoura Longfellow. The time-spirit which accepted the Cambridge poet has retreated before the latest time-spirit: an aftermath of the World War. To our bedlam speed, our science and psychology, disillusion and futility, the sweetness and light of the Victorian American are antipathetic. But any one interested in the march of our poetry must consider Longfellow carefully, for he contributed an important share to its development. In reviewing his collected poems, embracing eighteen successive volumes, one finds the best work, not in the jingles so easy to memorize, but in those mature lines in which he eschewed and escaped popularity. In relation to the collected bulk, such poems are rare, but they are available to the student catholic enough to attempt the devious and largely tedious journey through the man's long life-work. The present age, or any present age, has a tendency to look down from the fancied heights of sophistication upon the ages preceding it, and to judge them as stepping stones, or less than stepping stones. In our cocksure self-importance, we even assume we have sprung out of nowhere, and possess a divine right of intelligence straight from God, or whatever successor to God we believe in—if we believe in anything beyond our narcissism. To this ego, Longfellow seems absurd and laughable, and his former vogue incomprehensible. None the less, the man was a pioneer, and the first American to bridge the sea between Euro-

pean culture and parochial barbarism. The latest Americans racing abroad after the latest continental culture are sailing liners not unrelated to the little ship the young Bowdoin student boarded nearly a century ago.

He first went abroad in order to learn enough languages to take charge of the department allotted to him by his alma mater —a chair he gained at twenty-two. His second trip broadened his studies and enabled him to succeed George Ticknor at Harvard in the chair of Romance Languages—a post the poet served for eighteen years. The cultures he translated for America, mostly through his own poetry, were tastefully combed for their fairer aspects. He rarely yearned beyond the virtuous and the palatable. Inside these confines, he perfected his genius for a many-faceted facility. Evil books existed for him, but only once or twice did he permit their echoes to filter into his own work. On his last trip abroad, he dined with Ruskin in Paris; the latter recorded his impression of "a quiet simple gentleman . . . strangely innocent and calm, caring little for things out of his own serene sphere." Naïveté was also the qualifying factor he addressed in his countrymen. He fed their ignorance on European books felt through his own, and the childlike public devoured him devotedly. The still youthful land was heaven-bent for education, and Longfellow, a teacher from his earliest conscious years, turned his didactic bent and training to the best account. His audience, like himself, believed in the goodness of life, a goodness the Quakers and Unitarians had introduced in driving out the evil-believing Calvinists. Opening with the "Psalm Of Life," the poet of the people had arrived. In nine jingling verses, dripping with a larger number of clichés than any other poem in the language, Longfellow smote the heartstrings of the race. "Voices Of The Night" contained but a handful of poems in addition to the Psalm. But the Psalm was enough to gather an instantaneous public.

When the youthful professor engaged a room in Cambridge, his landlady, Mrs. Craigie, insisted on his occupying the one once honored by General Washington. Thus, the man "first in the hearts of his countrymen" was eventually followed by the

man who might be termed second. In the course of a year, four editions of the Voices were exhausted. For more than a decade, Longfellow had given himself to the writing of two books of prose, imitative of Washington Irving. Henceforth, with the exception of one more prose effort, he would devote his spare time to poetry. The doubt he felt about himself as a poet had been swept away by public opinion. Any further inclinations of a prosaic order could be satisfied in a poetic form, since much of his future work fell into prose metrically measured. This tendency mars his longest narratives, such as "Evangeline," "Hiawatha" and "Miles Standish."

Drenched from the outset in European cultures, and in love with tender beauty, Longfellow mastered many foreign forms and metres. Of all our early poets outside of Bryant and Poe, he was the most expert in the handling of versification, and handled many more varieties than the Puritan and the esthete. When "Voices Of The Night" appeared, Poe fired the first shot accusing his successful rival of plagiarism, and emphasized the similarities between Longfellow's "Beleaguered City" and his own "Haunted Palace." Poe was by no means above suspicion on the same score. An impartial reading of the two poems shows that his charge was scarcely justified. Both poems are concerned with ghosts. Poe's are a melancholy chorus that finally "smile no more"; while Longfellow's, fleeing a church bell, are treated to an optimistic moral Poe would never have stooped to. Poe not only hated Longfellow's didacticism, but envied his popularity as compared with his own titanic misery and neglect. With the publication of Longfellow's second volume, "Ballads And Other Poems," 1841, Poe launched an essay in which, after admitting the Professor had "written brilliant poems—by accident," he exposed the sentimentalist's weakness for obtrusive sermonizing. Curiously, the fiery Southerner paid respect to such maudlin verse as "The Village Blacksmith" and "The Wreck Of The Hesperus," both of which suffer from the Professor's besetting sweet sin. These ballads are extremely childish. It is impossible to believe in the Captain's little "daughtér" and in breakers roaring "Ho! ho!" Nor can one

respond to the insipid regularity of the lines to the mighty smith. This very monotony commended itself to the public: regular thought and action and dutiful goodness rewarding the day with the "night's repose." The poet did all the thinking and preaching; no effort was required of the public; hence his great audience. The day may begin "cold, and dark, and dreary," but "behind the clouds is the sun still shining." Even the melancholy poem, "It Is Not Always May," lilts so jauntily as to remove the sting from the terrible truth. Maidenhood betrays an indebtedness to German sentimentality, while "Excelsior," with its mounting slogan, now sounds like the caption of a transcontinental advertisement. Poe defended "Excelsior" against the critic, Langtree: "There is an old adage about the difficulty of one's furnishing an auditor both with matter to be comprehended and brains for its comprehension." But Longfellow did not need Poe to defend him. He had founded an organization known as The Five Of Clubs, composed of friends who fought his battles for him. Charles Sumner was one of the Five.

In the midst of the growing national upheaval which moved Whittier to action, Longfellow steeped himself in his classes and the legends of other lands. Close though he was to the rebellious Sumner, the gentle lover of lovely things removed himself, as always, from the life nearest at hand. A nostalgia for Europe and all remote things affected his writings throughout: he derived his inspiration mostly from books. After the Ballads had been translated into several European languages, foreigners recognized Longfellow as the outstanding representative of America. Craigie House was the haven Dickens entered on his first visit to our shores. In Longfellow, Englishmen greeted a true Victorian, and, thanks to a burly invitation from the novelist and a leave of absence from Harvard, the poet sailed for Europe a third time. Stocking his wardrobe with the latest fashions in clothes, boots and haberdashery, the dandy sailed homeward again. Moved by thoughts of Sumner, he deliberately wrote seven anti-slavery poems on shipboard. Though his worst antagonist, Margaret Fuller, hailed the sheaf

as "the thinnest of all Mr. Longfellow's thin books," Hawthorne, a former classmate at Bowdoin, declared: "You have never poetized a practical subject heretofore." Next to Whittier's war poems, Longfellow's are very insipid indeed.

Shortly after his return, in 1843, the *bonviveur* married a second time. Mrs. Craigie, the Voltairian atheist, having died two years before, the poet's affluent father-in-law gallantly bought Craigie House for Henry and Frances. The happy poet settled down in his new home, returned to his classes—which had begun to annoy him—and devoted his energies to two vast undertakings: an anthology, "The Poets And Poetry Of Europe," and a translation of sixteen cantos of the "Divina Commedia." In recognition of his first European love, Spain and the Spanish dramatists, he had already composed "The Spanish Student"—a play devoid of the requisite passion, but containing the exquisite Serenade. Further foreign indebtedness was acknowledged in "The Belfry Of Bruges." This volume roused Poe in earnest, ably supported by the former editor of the Transcendental *Dial*. Longfellow remained serene, the while his friends defended him. Was he not preparing his first collected edition, to be handsomely bound and illustrated? How little Longfellow was hurt by Poe came out years later, when he turned to the doting William Winter and said: "My works seemed to give him much trouble, first and last; but Mr. Poe is dead and gone, and I am alive and still writing—and that is the end of the matter."

Margaret Fuller affected him as little. Longfellow was not in favor with his Transcendental neighbors, nor they with him. Emerson recorded an unfavorable impression of the professor's extensive wine cellar—one of the few facts which endears him to present-day radicals. He dined with the Transcendentalists —especially after the founding of *The Atlantic Monthly* in 1857, and of the Saturday Club. But he was usually a silent spectator at these functions. Meanwhile, Miss Fuller's criticism, greatly admired by Poe, was even keener than Poe's: "It does not follow, because many books are written by persons born in America that there exists an American literature. . . . Long-

fellow is artificial and imitative. . . . He borrows incessantly, and mixes what he borrows. . . . He is very faulty in using broken or mixed metaphors. The ethical part of his writing has a hollow, second-hand sound." She paid tribute to his "elegance, love of the beautiful, and a fancy for what is large and manly—" but concluded: "And now farewell to the handsome book, with its Preciosos and Preciosas, its Vikings and knights and cavaliers, its flowers of all climes, and wild flowers of none." But the public rapturously hailed "The Belfry" and the collected edition. Did not "The Belfry" waft them into still other climes and ages: Ghent, Nuremberg, Normandy, Chimborazo, Florence, Elsinore, old France and still older Greece? And did it not offer such lyrics as "The Bridge," "The Day Is Done," "The Arrow And The Song," along with some excellent sonnets? For once in his Puritanical experience, the home-bred reader could find some attachment to art for its own sake—a highly salutary need. It is also salutary to find that the author did not share the public satisfaction with his work. The following proves he was not guilty of self-esteem:

> Half of my life is gone, and I have let
> The years slip from me and have not fulfilled
> The aspiration of my youth, to build
> Some tower of song with lofty parapet.

The Poe and Fuller attacks had one good effect: they caused him to turn to America for his next theme. But he chose a thing of legendry and hearsay, repeated to him by a friend of Hawthorne. The novelist left the Arcadian tale for the poet to embroider. Longfellow studied Nova Scotia, not at first hand, but through Haliburton. He visited neither Grand-Pré nor the Mississippi, but resorted to maps and records for descriptive effect—the best passages in Evangeline. The death of the lovers in Philadelphia came out of a walk down Spruce Street, and the technical machinery of the poem was modeled on the Greek hexameter. Out of these ingredients, the poet finished the idyl on his fortieth birthday. It met with an enormous sale, and Longfellow responded to a flattering review from

Hawthorne: "This success I owe entirely to you, for being willing to forego the pleasure of writing a prose tale which many people would have taken for poetry, that I might write a poem which many people take for prose." Whether moved by modesty or conviction, the poet actually revealed the prime fault of Evangeline. Poe carried the criticism further by showing the absurdity of trying to copy the Greek hexameter. The spondaic rhythms of the original have no counterpart in the genus of English speech. Poe, borrowing a leaf from Coleridge's attack on prosaic portions of Wordsworth, turned certain Longfellownian hexameters into prose, and exclaimed: "There!—That is respectable prose; and it will incur no danger of ever getting its character ruined by anybody's mistaking it for verse."

While one admires the natural ease of the narrative and the fine descriptive passages, one has to accept Poe's onslaught. And the prosy movement is frequently weakened by the entrance of far-fetched similes or mixed metaphors. Longfellow's fatal facility, his absorption in bookish lore, his lack of contact with life, led him into easy lines and lines filled out by sound regardless of meaning. Here are some random images. "The pewter plates on the dresser caught and reflected the flame, as shields of armies the sunshine." "As in a church, when the chant of the choir at intervals ceases, footfalls are heard in the aisles, or words of the priest at the altar, so, in each pause of the song, with measured motion the clock clicked." "Bent like a laboring oar, that toils in the surf of the ocean, bent, but not broken, by age was the form of the notary public." Faults such as these and many more did not trouble Longfellow's public. After all, here was a beautiful story of the love of two young people loyal through the years, of their cruel separation, of the search of the girl for the boy, of the woman turned white for the man breathing his last in her arms. It sounds like nothing more than a motion picture scenario. Here are those naïve elements, led by the arm of coincidence, which move a modern audience so profoundly and often.

The poet resigned from Harvard in 1854, partly because of

his tie with Sumner, which the College did not approve, but mainly because of a yearning to dedicate his remaining life to poetry. James Russell Lowell succeeded him. Longfellow, at the height of material comfort and safety, had but one rival in the field of poetic popularity: Alfred Lord Tennyson. "Evangeline" and "The Princess" had appeared during the same year, and now came "The Song Of Hiawatha" and "Idyls Of The King." Turning once more to books for his inspiration, Longfellow decided to employ the technical scheme of the Finnish epic, "Kalevala," with its unrhymed trochaic diameter, on an old Indian legend. Various historians, by no means noted for their fidelity to truth, supplied the principal sources of Hiawatha, and to these were added the tales of an Ojibway chief who paid visits to Craigie House—Kah-ge-go-gah-bowh. The result was a careless fusion and confusion of the Ojibway and Algonquin demigod, Manabozho, and an Iroquois chief of the sixth century, "Hiawatha." The delightful villainies of the original Manabozho were transferred, not to Hiawatha, but to the villain of the new piece: Pau-Pau-Kee-Wis. Longfellow, like his beloved Cooper, insisted on creating his heros in images of purity. Naturally, too, the hero would need a heroine to enhance the appeal of the story: the apocryphal Minnehaha. This charming girl was a concession to the sentimental white race, for the Indian is the most realistic of races. Even more glaring, positively preposterous, is the conclusion of the narrative: the entrance of the white man and his Savior as the appointed rulers of the Indian—and thus appointed by the Indian god, Gitche Manito. Hiawatha himself beholds this climax in a pictorial vision utterly without foundation in Indian psychology. Even to-day, with the scattered, depleted tribes in physical subjection to our governmental and religious systems, the traditions and prayers of the Indian persist. Hiawatha's vision is pure Longfellow and impure Indian.

Though the Indians are pardoned by Christ, it is not clear what sins they committed, unless it be that they occupied our land before the advent of our forefathers. They peacefully accept the message of the White Prophet, and gratefuly resign the

land to the Christians. Hiawatha departs, leaving his people to the care of their new friends and brothers. The poem met with the most enthusiastic approbation. Not alone had the poet spun a number of exotic tales, but he had done so with the full grace and sentiment of his innocent heart. To the steady lilt of the trochaic beat and feminine endings, the ears of his readers were gently captured and lulled. Not for a moment through the several thousand lines does the slightly syncopated movement vary or halt. The unfolding tale, once you submit to its hyperboles, is remarkably well handled. As always in Longfellow, description takes precedence over the plot, characterization and interplay of action. The man was too restricted to write out of any other medium but his own naïve nature. Cautious from childhood, well protected by his parents, his first wife, his second, his friends, his readers and most of his critics, the occasions he had to face life were rare. The clouds visiting his home were removed by the sun fairly soon. He loved to live with his ever-increasing library. The books he took down were generally those *en rapport* with his dulcet temperament. Small wonder that his second-hand transfiguration of Indian legendry caught the hearts of his countrymen and those of Victorian England. Longfellow won his public as easily as Hiawatha won Minnehaha. And to the praises of the people were added the praises of Emerson, Hawthorne and Tennyson. Added to these came the highest compliment of all: the many burlesques which persist down to the present day.

Though the national upheaval neared its crisis, Longfellow remained true to his books. Consulting volumes dealing with Plymouth and the Pilgrims, and again employing his prosy version of the Greek hexameter, he composed the serene measures of "The Courtship Of Miles Standish." Nothing could be more prosy or worse prose than the opening lines; or the description of the captain's war-like library:

> Fixed to the opposite wall was a shelf of
> books, and among them
> Prominent three, distinguished alike for
> bulk and for binding;

Bariffe's Artillery Guide, and the
Commentaries of Cæsar
Out of the Latin translated by Arthur
Goldinge of London,
And, as if guarded by these, between them
was standing the Bible.

This is probably the worst of the Longfellow epics, but it is graced with the first feminist in American poetry: Priscilla Alden. From his earliest down to his latest days, the poet had an eye for the ladies. Though he never permitted himself to stray beyond a courtly decorum, he seldom failed to record some pleasing impression. One may assume that Priscilla was drawn from life: she is more vivid than most of Longfellow's characters. Her historic retort to Alden—"Why don't you speak for yourself, John?"—is worthy of some up-to-date miss. Her portrait benefits from the tender humor with which the poet endows her. The scholarly John is endowed with unconscious humor, as he rushes headlong into the air and sees in the flirtatious girl, "the temptation of Satan!" Poor John is denounced by Standish as the Brutus to Miles' beloved Cæsar. Determined to sail back to England, John is overtaken by the Ibsenesque Priscilla. The movie ends happily when Standish reports himself dead among the Indians and appears at the wedding in time to unite the Aldens. A week after the book appeared, twenty-five thousand copies had been sold.

Longfellow's paradisaic existence was once more interrupted by tragedy. The terrible burning to death of his wife, Frances, was a shock he never outgrew. They had been married for eighteen years—a numeral haunting his life so repeatedly that he wrote a poem about it: the beautiful sonnet, "The Cross Of Snow." Bryant, after the death of his wife, turned to translating Homer. Longfellow sought consolation in Dante, and went back to his translation at the time the Southern Rebellion broke out. The poet had written the first and second flights of his "Birds Of Passage," a reversion to the lyrical forms most suited to his temperament. Among them is the jocund sketch, "The Children's Hour," relating the pranks of the "blue-eyed

banditti," Alice, Allegra and Edith. He dreamed more and more of the past, and in "My Lost Youth," pregnant with memories of his native Portland, made use of a Lapland refrain part of which served as the title of a book by Robert Frost:

> "A boy's will is the wind's will,
> And the thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts."

At the height of the war, secluded in his summer home at Nahant, Longfellow began a collection of ballads and legends, connected with a Prelude, Interludes and Epilogue. For one reader at least, "Tales Of A Wayside Inn" is the poet's most enduring work. The scene is laid in the Old Horse Tavern in Sudbury, where Longfellow and a group of friends foregathered. The identity of the characters was clear to his readers, nor did he disguise them. Ole Bull, Israel Edrehi, T. W. Parsons, Luigi Monti, Daniel Treadwell and Henry Ware Wells formed the cast sitting about the "kind of old Hobgoblin Hall," the while the silent poet acted as the reporter of proceedings. Thanks to their intimacy, an intimacy he grasped realistically, the characters are delightfully differentiated; and the most attractive element is the aura of humor around them. The poet had a number of classical models to draw from: Boccaccio, Chaucer, Tennyson and others. It is to his credit that he gave free vent to the masculinity of the occasion and did not, as formerly, whitewash the tales with Puritanical restraints. Two or three are akin to Maestro Boccaccio himself. The varying measures are skillfully attuned to the type of fiction unfolded, and the interludes are rich in detail and movement. Some of the poems had already appeared; it was Longfellow's task to add new material and to give the work a dramatic sequence. "The First Day" was issued in 1863, The Second and Third about ten years later.

Once more the poet took his readers around the earth. It was due to this escape from the war that the poem owed its popularity. The first ballad is at once the most popular and least important: "Paul Revere's Ride." From this, the Student turns to a love tale, borrowing a passage from the Decameron. Then

the reader is transported to "The Legend Of Rabbi Ben Levi," "King Robert Of Sicily," "The Saga Of King Olaf," "Torquemada," "The Birds Of Killingworth." Each of these ballads is informed with dramatic fire, the color and movement of their periods, and that clash of character required by the classic ballad monger. Longfellow had never contrived better atmosphere than the opening measures of "Torquemada." This poem, as well as "King Robert," has genuine power and ease of narration. "The Birds Of Killingworth" is a contrasting allegory. The tale satirizes the instinct of killing and is partly directed against the early American Colonies. Squire, Parson and Deacon are gently ridiculed. From their midst, the Preceptor of the Academy, a lover of the "fair Almira" and a composer of sonnets, comes to the defense of birds condemned to death for living on the grain of the land:

> "Plato, anticipating the Reviewers,
> From his Republic banished without pity
> The Poets; in this little town of yours,
> You put to death, by means of a Committee,
> The ballad-singers and the Troubadours,
> The street-musicians of the heavenly city,
> The birds, who make sweet music for us all
> In our dark hours, as David did for Saul. . . ."

Then follows a plea for the birds, not excepting the crow. However—

> Men have no faith in fine-spun sentiment
> Who put their trust in bullocks and in beaves—

so the troubadours are condemned. The ensuing stanza revels in a "very St. Bartholomew of Birds!" Discovering, like Herod, they have been slaughtering Innocents, the townspeople repeal the law against the birds, and lead in wagons from out of town, laden with wicker cages "full of singing birds." With the wedding of Almira and the Preceptor—a moral no reader can object to—the ballad reaches a charming cadence. "The First Day" is brought to a close by the sound of human "bagpipes" and the nodding of the sleepy landlord.

"The Second Day" opens with "a cold, uninterrupted rain" outdoors, and the inmates are reduced to plying the imprisoned hours with more tales. The reader, regaled with further circumnavigation, is conducted through Atri in Abruzzo, the city of Kandalu, Hageman in Alsace, Stralsund by the Baltic Sea, St. Castine in the Pyrenees. There is another American tale: an interpolation defending Longfellow's preference of old and foreign over new and local material. "The Third Day" shows no decline in imaginative power. It was written at a time when the poet, according to his critics, had waned pitifully. This part is in fact the most mature of the three. The Spanish Jew relates the incisive legend of Rajah Runjiet-Sing, who appeals to the wizardry of Solomon to help him escape Azrael, the Angel of Death. The king lifts his signet-ring and a mighty wind bears the wretched scholar to a distant, happy place:

> Then said the Angel, smiling: "If this man
> Be Rajah Runjiet-Sing of Hindostan,
> Thou hast done well to listen to his prayer;
> I was upon my way to seek him there."

The sombre blank verse pageant of the coming of Charlemagne follows. This ballad of Olger and Desiderio has terror and a swift epigrammatic climax. There is another American tale. This one has psychological searchings anticipating Edwin Arlington Robinson. Often admitting the sources of his material, Longfellow then turns to a full-bellied recital of "The Monks Of Casal-Maggiore," a rollicking narrative concerning two Franciscan friars. True to the Florentine tradition, it might have graced the pages of Machiavelli. And it is made out of whole-cloth:

> "A tale that cannot boast, forsooth,
> A single rag or shred of truth . . .
> Therefore I tell it; or, maybe,
> Simply because it pleases me."

It was something for a New Englander to give way to hedonism. Whatever his didacticism, sentimental taints and derivative strains, a poet had arrived who, like his Southern antagonist,

believed in beauty, and occasionally let it capture him without a Puritanic protest. An Albanian tale and a ballad in Uhlandian couplets lead to another confession of artistic faith on Longfellow's part, and a defense of his roving spirit. Poets are "birds of passage," he declaims.

> "They are not fowls in barnyards born
> To cackle o'er a grain of corn;
> And, if you shut the horizon down
> To the small limits of their town,
> What do you do but degrade your bard
> Till he at last becomes as one
> Who thinks the all-encircling sun
> Rises and sets in his back yard?"

These lines supply an excellent text on the movement toward expatriation setting in with Whistler and Henry James, and the poets, Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot. A man who could only find his pleasures abroad and stayed at home was soon to be followed by Americans who consigned their homes to the devil and cast their restless lot with London, Paris, or Italy.

The "Tales Of A Wayside Inn" closes appropriately with an old Puritan ballad told by the Landlord. This is the tale of Sir Christopher Gardiner, who lived with a golden-haired lady "in the Italian manner," though he had two wives in England "whom he had carelessly left behind." Governor Winthrop, apprised of the knight's wickedness, sends bailiffs to arrest him. All they find at the country seat is "the little lady with golden hair"

> Who was gathering in the bright sunshine
> The sweet alyssum and columbine.

They arrest the girl instead and drag her in triumph before the Governor. His heart is moved by the sight of

> So fair a creature caught within
> The snares of Satan and of sin.

Unable to arrive at a better sentence, he ships her off to England to bear the other wives company. The knight is captured by an Indian and brought to the Governor. Pleading that "the

colonial laws were too severe when applied to a gallant cavalier," Sir Christopher is likewise banished home. The Landlord concludes:

> Thus endeth the Rhyme of Sir Christopher,
> Knight of the Holy Sepulchre,
> The first who furnished this barren land
> With apples of Sodom and ropes of sand.

To which may be added the droll comment that Longfellow, of all poets, was the first to bring such a theme into American poetry.

Shortly after the conclusion of the war, Longfellow brought out a book of shorter poems, "Flower-De-Luce," and the collected Household Edition in seven volumes. "Flower-De-Luce," showing more restraint than the earlier lyrics, is distinguished for the sonnet sequence on the "Divina Commedia." The more popular poems are mere echoes of the moralizing jingles of yore. The publication of the Dante translation, in conjunction with Charles Eliot Norton's prose version, was held off until 1867, the six hundredth anniversary of the immortal Italian's birth-year. Longfellow had founded a Dante Club at his home, to which Lowell, Norton and others were invited over the best of dinners and wines. To this select circle, the new associate editor of *The Atlantic* was admitted—William Dean Howells—a youthful harbinger of the advance of the Middle-West into American literature.

Except for his life-work, "The Christus Mystery," and the posthumous "Michael Angelo," practically the whole of Longfellow's remaining poems were housed in the shorter forms. He never mastered the epic form of the major poets: of all his extended efforts the Christus is the most dismal. Though he considered it his *chef d'œuvre* and kept it in mind over a period of thirty years, this Christian pageant of the "Apostolic, Middle and Modern Ages" is long-drawn-out and devoid of dramatic sequence or connection. The scenes are diffuse and episodic, and the best speeches, many of them long and prosaic, depend too literally on biblical or historical quotation and too little on

passionate inspiration. The "Michael Angelo" is a much better dramatic poem. It is worthy of note that among the metres employed in the Christus, there is a dialogue in the irregular cadences of a latter-day free verse.

Volumes of shorter poems continued to appear at fairly close intervals. They added little to the poet's established reputation, though he received three thousand dollars from *The New York Ledger* for the mediocre "Hanging Of The Crane." "The Sermon Of St. Francis," "The Three Kings," "Keramos" and some of the sonnets are notable exceptions. In "Moods," he again voiced his secret dissatisfaction with himself:

> Oh that a Song would sing itself to me
> Out of the heart of Nature, or the heart
> Of man, the child of Nature, not of Art,
> Fresh as the morning, salt as the salt sea,
> With just enough of bitterness to be
> A medicine to this sluggish mood, and start
> The life-blood in my veins, and so impart
> Healing and help in this dull lethargy!

But Longfellow was fated from the outset to find the best of himself at second hand in books. He could rarely let himself go —a restraint he shared with all Yankees, including the intoxicated Emerson. Whatever the shortcomings Longfellow brooded over, they were closed to the general public. On his last trip abroad, 1867, he had been heralded by Victorians, led by the Queen. She sent for him as the accredited minister of the whilom British Colony. With that unerring eye for colonizing countries even after they are lost, British leaders pressed momentous honors on the bashful American and his daughters. Longfellow breakfasted with Gladstone and the Duke of Argyle and lunched with Lord John Russell. And Victoria could see how anxious her attendants were to steal a glimpse of the poet so many of whose poems they had memorized. Down to this day, he is the most popular American poet in the British Empire, a fact attested by his bust in Westminster Abbey.

At home the honors continued down to his death. Though

old New England was dying, under ruthless machines in the hands of youthful industrialism, the children of Cambridge proved they still loved their poet by bringing him a birthday chair hewn from the village blacksmith's chestnut tree. To them he might rightly address the lines of that occasion:

> Am I a king, that I should call my own
> This splendid ebon throne?

The final verse is prophetic of the fate into which the bulk of his work has fallen. Memorized by children at school, it is discredited as soon as they graduate:

> Only your love and your remembrance could
> Give life to this dead wood,
> And make these branches, leafless now so long,
> Blossom again in song.

This poem appeared in his last volume: "Ultima Thule." This sheaf contains the valiant sonnet, "Victor And Vanquished," wherein the old man, fully aware of his disabilities, faces "triumphant Death."

> Wounded and weak, sword broken at the hilt,
> With armor shattered, and without a shield,
> I stand unmoved; do with me what thou wilt;
> I can resist no more, but will not yield.

To his array of published books, he addressed a sonnet as might some old knight who "gazed at the arms he could no longer wield."

His last poem, "The Bells Of San Blas," shapes the thought that the past cannot be recalled:

> Out of the shadows of night
> The world rolls into light;
> It is daybreak everywhere—

a daybreak that would soon leave the author of the "Psalm Of Life" out of its concerns. It is unfortunate that derogatory critics of Longfellow have appropriated Emerson's speech at the poet's grave: "I cannot recall the name of our friend, but he was a good man." The old men were not intimates, nor did they

admire each other with any degree of enthusiasm. But when Emerson made his comment, he was in the last stages of aphasia. Not long after Longfellow's interment in Mt. Auburn, the Concordian followed Thoreau and Hawthorne to Sleepy Hollow. The most popular and the greatest poet of the New England renascence went down together in 1882.

X

THE POET OF TOO MANY ISMS

There is Lowell, who's striving Parnassus to climb
With a whole bale of isms *tied together with rhyme—*
James Russell Lowell.

WHEN the sons of Democracy, Lowell and Whitman, were born, they were sixteen years the juniors of Emerson, twelve of Whittier and Longfellow, and ten of Poe and Holmes. Lowell came to light on Washington's Birthday, Whitman the day after Decoration Day. But Walt remained in comparative obscurity throughout his life, the while his year-twin rose to distinction as the foremost man of letters on the American scene. Lowell was chosen editor of the new *Atlantic Monthly*, 1857, two years after he succeeded Longfellow in the Smith chair at Harvard. Though Emerson, Longfellow and Holmes were present at the first meeting, the older poets tacitly considered their junior the nominal leader of the venture. He was the most brilliant scholar at the table and a thoroughgoing man of the world.

As with Bryant, the first American poet, Lowell's genius for public service constantly distracted him from the art of his formative years. His achievements in poetry attracted public attention before his thirtieth year: the first "Biglow Papers," "The Fable For Critics" and "The Vision Of Sir Launfal." These versatile productions stamped Lowell as an unusual critic and wit, an ardent patriot, and a lover of Nature and the masses, down to the lowest beggar—Christ disguised as a leper. Lowell had the right to claim, "I am a bookman." He was a prodigious reader with a prodigious memory who applied his reading to life and the human race he loved and championed. This man of energy and joyousness suffered from a brilliant eccentricity diffi-

cult to control. He was the grandest talker of his time and apparently the most voluminous and entertaining of letter writers. He had more friends than any of his fellows, and doubtless deserved them. The busiest worldling among his contemporaries, he received the highest national honors. He went to Spain and England as our minister, was decorated by British universities, and remembered with Longfellow in Westminster Abbey. It was Lowell who helped to unveil the statue of his lifelong friend, and Lowell who touched hands with pioneer New England, through Emerson, and with the younger generation from the West—Howells, Bret Harte, Mark Twain. He was thus the man most centrally concerned in the older and newer America. His perpetual activity hampered his poems. They reflect the imperfections of a man too ardent and too talkative to give them the final finish to make them endure. He was the most unequal of the poets of the New England renascence. No poet had higher qualities than Lowell at his best, but in his impetuous fashion, he piled qualities on qualities, until they often lapsed into quantities. Had he been able to apply to himself the critical faculties he applied to others, he might have been the finest poet of his age. Even the beloved "Commemoration Ode" was dashed off in six tumultuous hours, the night before he read it at Harvard. Poe's peer as a critic, he had not the Southerner's painstaking genius for revision. But Poe was an isolated perfectionist, Lowell a garrulous, gallivanting humanist.

Into the midst of a race noted for its restraints, Lowell came bounding. These restraints, curbing the spontaneity of his fellows, would have aided the Cambridge poet in mastering his medium. Lowell excelled in single, rapturous flights. When the flights mount one another and are weighted with allusions to books and histories fantastically remote, the eye and ear cannot follow the poet. He had, in especial, an amazing predilection for interminable sentences, and rather than rest the eye with a sporadic period, he dropped in colons and semicolons and flew into higher altitudes. Despite the humanism impelling his utterance, he failed in that final marriage of expression and communication essential to the artist. He was

adored by his generation, not because of his artistry, but because of the timeliness of his appeal. Now that the issues he fought for have been settled, it becomes increasingly difficult to read Lowell with anything like the delight he bequeathed to his time. The keenest student, to be sure, will find evils in the present hour akin to those which outraged the creator of Biglow, and discover analogies between Lowell and his brother reformer, Whittier. But to the student who looks for form as well as reform (to parody Lowell's punning), Lowell will prove exasperating. He attacked his gravest sin in "The Fable For Critics": "a whole bale of *isms* tied together with rhyme."

This dazzling fable, which owed a good deal to Byron's "English Bards And Scottish Reviewers," and to which in turn Amy Lowell owed her "Fable For Critics," is remarkable for its incisive etchings of some of Lowell's contemporaries. Seizing the most daring similes and rhymes, it tears along in a pellmell of wit and slapstick. Not even our own prince of punsters, Louis Untermeyer, can compete with Lowell; nor did Lowell's day reveal a man with a shrewder independence of judgment. His comments on his fellows are all the more admirable in view of the comparatively early day in which they were penned. But the reader must first wade through an almost interminable introduction presided over by Phœbus, the god of poets and poetasters. What a sigh of relief when the hero of the tale emerges: "one of the omnivorous swallowers," a critic. After another involved passage, we come to these delightful lines:

> Through his babyhood no kind of pleasure he took
> In any amusement but tearing a book. . . .
> Like the Irish Good Folk, though in length scarce a span,
> From the womb he came gravely, a little old man.

The career of this "donkey" is developed with a venomous detail outstripping Poe himself. Having arrived at "the post of a regular heavy reviewer,"

> If any old book reached a fiftieth edition,
> He could fill forty pages with safe erudition:
> He could gauge the old books by the old set of rules,
> And his very old nothings pleased very old fools;

> But give him a new book, fresh out of the heart,
> And you put him at sea without compass or chart. . . .

After further boiling in the oil of Lowell's wit, the critic is appointed by Phœbus to drive away the rabble of rhymesters who have interrupted the "tranquil siesta" they had once had the power to give him through their versicles. Further digressions intervene, and the self-conscious Lowell advises the reader to skip them or light his cigar with the Fable. One of the digressions is a clever description of the god revising a sonnet of his own, a task at which he is interrupted by the apparition of some poet who makes a supremely asinine plea for British criticism:

> "My American puffs I would willingly burn all . . .
> To get but a kick from a transmarine journal!"

The history of British condescension and Colonial prostration before "some twopenny editor" is savagely bared in this, the longest of digressions. At length, Rufus Griswold, a welcome apparition for once in his career, "leads on the flocks whom he first plucks alive, and then feeds on—" Lowell's revenge for the part the anthologist played after Poe's death. Lowell then settles down to the brilliant sketches of his contemporaries.

Naturally Emerson, the American he revered the most, comes first. This respect is toned down by some judicious criticism—the best attack ever launched at the bard's dual strength and weakness:

> 'Tis refreshing to old-fashioned people like me
> To meet such a primitive Pagan as he,
> In whose mind all creation is duly respected
> As parts of himself—just a little projected;
> And who's willing to worship the stars and the sun,
> A convert to—nothing but Emerson.

The comparison between Emerson and Carlyle is the outstanding passage in the entire Fable—literary portraiture of the first order. The two great friends are superseded by Emerson's long line of pallid imitators, "who omit no part of the man but his wisdom and wit." There is a precious dig at the seer's

occasional inability to recognize his disciple's work as offshoots of his own, and Lowell matches Emerson's criticism of Alcott:

> While he talks he is great, but goes out like a taper,
> If you shut him up closely with pen, ink and paper.

Of the other poets, the fop, N. P. Willis, is admired for certain aspects of shallowness "in a country where scarcely a village is found that has not its author sublime and profound." Bryant receives the celebrated comparison to the North Pole which Lowell afterwards regretted. At the time of the Fable, the young poet could not forgive the veteran for accusing him of plagiarizing one of the latter's poems. Whittier, as a fellow Abolitionist, is highly favored, but Richard Henry Dana is greeted with buckshot which strikes all poets afflicted with timidity—

> Who'll be going to write what'll never be written,
> Till the Muse, ere he think of it, gives him the mitten,—
> Who is so well aware of how things should be done,
> That his own works displease him before they're begun . . .

By contrast, we have the self-confident John Neal,

> Who might have been poet, but that, in its stead, he
> Preferred to believe he was so already . . .

Following the novelists, Hawthorne and Cooper, comes a stirring interlude in which Lowell once more attacks America's so-called indebtedness to Britain. In this passage, written about eighty years ago, John Bull has already accused the young country of dollar worship, "a church," according to the satirist, which John attends as often as we do. Furthermore,

> Like most fathers, Bull hates to see Number One
> Displacing himself in the mind of his son. . . .
> To love one another you're too like by half;
> If he is a bull, you're a pretty stout calf,
> And tear your own pasture for naught but to show
> What a nice pair of horns you're beginning to grow.

Lowell was aware of the inexperience of the race, and its youthful pretensions. He returned to the theme with added vigor in

the essay, "On A Certain Condescension In Foreigners." Of the craven imitativeness of his people, he declares in the Fable:

> Though you ought to be free as the winds and the waves,
> You've the gait and the manners of runaway slaves,
> Though you brag of your New World, you don't half believe in it;
> And as much of the Old as is possible weave in it. . . .

Circumlocution again intervenes and it grows apparent that the poem has, alas, no definite scheme. Poe and his raven, à la Barnaby Rudge, finally arrive—"three fifths of him genius and two fifths sheer fudge." Despite this deserved thrust, Lowell was Poe's one friend "around Boston," and they corresponded and contributed to each other's periodical ventures. The Cambridge poet was invited to write a definitive biographical sketch of the Southerner. But the young Yankee could not overlook Poe's warfare on Longfellow—nor one or two barbs he himself received at a time when he was cocksure of his own genius. And when Lowell, shortly after his marriage to the exquisite Maria White, called on the Poe menage, the author of "The Raven" was in no gentlemanly condition to receive visitors. Poe is thrust aside in the Fable, and Longfellow ably defended—if we happen to share Lowell's love for "Evangeline"—

> That's not ancient nor modern, its place is apart
> Where time has no sway, in the realm of pure art . . .

After further circumlocution, a reconsideration of American values brings the poet to his native Massachusetts. The Bay state receives a high-spirited tribute from the Mayflower, through the conquest of the coast, to the music of "mill-hearts . . . trip-hammers . . . sledges . . . shuttles . . ."

> What though those horn hands have as yet found small time
> For painting and sculpture and music and rhyme?
> These will come in due order; the need that pressed sorest
> Was to vanquish the seasons, the ocean, the forest. . . .

Having tilled the soil, materially and spiritually, Massachusetts has created the theme for the future artist. This ardent ode to the mother land is typical of the impassioned, improvised utter-

ance of his other odes. Nor was his patriotism compact of impure sentiment. He was too clear-headed to evade the faults of the Union.

A delicate tribute to Holmes, Lowell's fellow wit and club member, is contrasted with the satire on the author himself. Old Halleck is admired for his "genial manliness," but deplored for "peddling away" his talents in a bank. A troop of "American everything elses" rushes in, and here one reads a warning to future generations whose everything elses are hailed by critics of the time as the *sine qua non* of incomparable genius. The critic and hero of the Fable, whose whereabouts have been lost to the reader, suddenly comes back to Apollo, bearing a thistle instead of the lily we somehow remember the god had called for. The god then turns on the rabble with "some brief hints on criticism," and draws a droll analogy between the classical days of the Muse when "we were luckily free from such things as reviews," and the present, where

> Nature fits all her children with something to do,
> He who would write and can't write, can surely review. . . .

"The Fable For Critics" was issued anonymously and so were "The Biglow Papers." Behind the persons of Hosea Biglow, of his antithesis, Birdofredum Sawin, and of Rev. Homer Wilbur, the pompous editor of their writings, the author masked himself in the most salient hoax in American literature and the first concentrated poetic attack on the camps of slavery. The first series was aimed at the evils leading to the war with Mexico—a territory in which slave owners hoped to extend the slave trade. The second was occasioned by the Civil War. Not the least diverting motif behind the plot lay in the heavily condescending comments and glossaries of the Rev. Wilbur as a corrective to the poetic outpourings of his illiterate parishioner, Hosea. Here as elsewhere, Lowell could not resist his own garrulity: the satire on the pompous academe loses point through verbosity. Wilbur is a delightful numskull so long as he confines himself to attempted improvements on the thinking and the Yankee dialect of his pupil. Genuine satire is achieved when

the master rewrites Hosea's poem, "The Two Gunners," after the manner of Gay and Prior, "to the end that he might see how easily even such subjects as he treated of were capable of a more refined style and more elegant expression." Behind these two versions of the annexation of Texas after the Mexican War, Lowell gave vent to his canny observation of the forgetfulness of the race, once divided and soon united over an imperialistic issue. The most admirable trait throughout his career is the refusal of his patriotism to stoop to chauvinism. He held such a phrase as "My country, right or wrong," in the greatest contempt. And yet it would be hard to conceive of a deeper faith in American Democracy than Lowell's.

Hosea's Yankee dialect was not a fancied figment, but a studied development of the talk of country people the poet had known from his boyhood. The first of the Papers—mailed to *The Boston Courier* by the bogus father of Hosea—sounds the note of pacifism as against conscription:

> Ez for war, I call it murder,—
> There you hev it plain an' flat;
> I don't want to go no furder
> Than my Testyment for that;
> God hez sed so plump an' fairly,
> It's ez long ez it is broad,
> An' you've gut to git up airly
> Ef you want to take in God. . . .

Hosea has refused to enlist, but his friend, Birdofredum Sawin, had been "cussed fool enuf to goe attrottin inter Miss Chiff arter a Drum and fife." The disillusioned Sawin writes Hosea from the front, and Hosea, aided by Parson Wilbur, translates the letter into verse. The gist of the complaint lies in the long couplet:

> This sort o' thing aint *jest* like thet,—
> I wish thet I wuz furder,—
> Ninepunce a day fer killin' folks comes
> kind o' low fer murder.

Birdofredum is a forerunner of Kipling's Tommy Atkins. Their kinship is most apparent in the following:

Our ossifers aint wut they wuz afore they
left the Bay-state;
Then it wuz "Mister Sawin, sir, you're
middlin' well now, be ye?
Step up an' take a nipper, sir; I'm
dreffle glad to see ye";
But now it's "Ware's my eppylet?
here, Sawin, step an' fetch it!
An' mind your eye, be thundrin' spry,
or, damn ye, you shall ketch it!"

The poem, "What Mr. Robinson Thinks," is an attack on the pernicious "My country, right or wrong," and was intended for vacillating Northern statesmen who sided with the war party. The young poet earned the everlasting opprobrium of North and South alike, except among pacifists and anti-imperialists, for the first Biglow Papers spread contagion throughout the country. The young enthusiast created "Increase D. O'Phase" to interpret the emotions of statesmen who believed in the right solely as an abstract notion:

A marciful Providence fashioned us holler
O' purpose that we might our princerples swaller.

"The Debate In The Sennit" is couched, with dire irony, in the form of a nursery rhyme, while conservative newspapers are riddled in "The Pious Editor's Creed":

It's wal enough agin a king
To dror resolves an' triggers,—
But libbaty's a kind o' thing
That don't agree with niggers.

"A Letter From A Candidate For The Presidency" is a sketch of the mischievous type of opportunist who slides back and forth in accordance with what the majority of voters know or don't know they want. No phase of the most arrant or subtle hypocrisy in high places escaped Lowell's venomous satire.

The second series, begun about fifteen years later, is inferior to the first, though the author threw himself into the still greater issues of the Civil War. After a verbose preface in which he removed his anonymity and stated his reasons for reviving

Hosea and his circle, we arrive at the dialect poem, "The Courtin'," the most popular of Lowell's shorter poems. It loses much of its charm through the introduction of humorous similes as far-fetched as the sentimental sallies of Longfellow. The second series lacks the spontaneity of the first. Self-consciousness accompanied the removal of the old anonymity, along with a decline in the promising poetic powers of Lowell's youth. None the less, the new series is a record of his continued industry in behalf of freedom and the Union.

While "The Biglow Papers" render ample justice to Lowell, the patriot and reformer, and are couched in the language of the people, the poet's prolix impetuosity marred the book as a whole. Several of the poems antedating the Fable and the Papers had given evidence of a charmingly direct style, especially in the realm of the affections which played a steadfast rôle throughout his warm life. There is something strained and stilted even here, and one turns to Lowell's letters of affection, touching his children most of all, for many a memorable passage. The average New England poet had little room in his work for the affections. The lover in Lowell too often betrayed a moralist and theorist, too rarely the simple creature of the heart. The delicate Maria White, a lesser poet than her husband, but an even more ardent Abolitionist, inspired the dedication of his first volume, 1843, and was the supreme star of his propagandistic career. Of the four children she bore him, three died in early infancy. The first born and dearest, Blanche, died at the age of fourteen months; Lowell hung the only shoes she had ever worn, in his room. There they remained—in the house in which he was born, the house in which he died: beautiful Elmwood in Cambridge. Mrs. Lowell followed the three children in 1853. Though Lowell married again, the fragile Maria White haunted his life to the end.

The year 1848 represented Lowell at the height of his poetic fame. To the publication of the Fable and the Papers was added a popular triumph in still another field: "The Vision Of Sir Launfal." This allegory, like his other long poems, suffers from verbosity, confusion of plot, the vagaries of a care-

less rapture. Lowell was usually through with his poems as soon as they were set down. None needs revision more than Sir Launfal. There are compelling passages, rare glints and cadences. The lovely opening measure is quickly vitiated by a jumpy, didactic quatrain which gives way to a series of epigrams closing on the sunny line, "June may be had by the poorest comer." This month was Lowell's favorite, as it might have been for any man housed in by long New England winters. The renowned apostrophe to June follows at length—twenty-three lines composing a single sentence of poetry, commonplace and didacticism. Without forewarning, this introduction drops into

> What wonder if Sir Launfal now
> Remembered the keeping of his vow?

Part One opens with the knight's announcement of his intended mission in search of the Grail. Slumber and the vision overtake him. It appears

> That the castle alone in the landscape lay
> Like an outpost of winter, dull and gray—

that only "lord or lady of high degree" were admitted by the knight, and that not even the summer could make an impression on "the churlish stone." Suddenly, the drawbridge drops and the knight rides forth on his fancied mission. Ruinous interruptions and awkward cadences lead him on somehow and—

> As Sir Launfal made morn through the darksome gate,—
> He was 'ware of a leper, crouched *by the same* . . .
> The flesh 'neath his armor '*gan shrink* and crawl,
> And *midway its leap* his heart stood still
> Like a frozen waterfall . . .

Whether Lowell was bent on medieval effects or not, there is no condoning the phrases I've taken the liberty to italicize. The leper, declining the scornful gold tossed to him by the knight, indulges in a fine Christian moral in the language of the author. For some reason, we need another prelude, and this is almost as long as the first. Picturesquely enough, it offers a wintry landscape to apprehend the change of mood and the knight's

change of heart, still in the arms of his vision. But the sentence describing the dour effects of winter dashes along for thirty-seven lines. This is exuberance with a vengeance on the reader. The "elfin builders of the frost" have erected a palace to whose halls Sir Launfal, now old and gray, is refused admittance. Part Second opens promisingly:

> There was never a leaf on bush or tree,
> The bare boughs rattled shudderingly;
> The river was dumb and could not speak,
> For the weaver Winter its shroud had spun . . .

Then follow descriptions of a crow and of morning, in which the crow is masculine and the morning feminine, as compared with the neuter gender of the river. This may be carping over little things, but it is in his handling of little things that a true poet shows his mastery. Sir Launfal has returned from the Grail empty-handed, and found in his own halls "another heir to his earldom." Musing on the past and a former "sunnier clime," the old man is approached by a caravan. With the speech, "For Christ's sweet sake, I beg an alms," the leper reappears "in the desolate horror of his disease." Without further ado, the knight beholds in him "an image of Him who died on the tree—" a fine passage, but much too abrupt in its arrival. The sharing with the beggar of the knight's "single crust" is a moving passage, and mounts to the revelation of Christ in a beautiful speech on the Holy Supper. The Grail sought by Sir Launfal lay in the cup he filled at the stream.

> "Not what we give, but what we share,
> For the gift without the giver is bare;
> Who gives himself with his alms feeds three,
> Himself, his hungering neighbor, and me."

The poem could have closed most happily here, but Lowell, like his friend, Longfellow, had to impose a moral, lest the American reader fail to find the poem's implication. The moral underscores the democratic equality of the human race.

"Under The Willows" is a much finer composition. The title poem of a volume dedicated to Charles Eliot Norton, with whom

Lowell edited *The North American Review* for eight years, this ode to June is more flowing than Sir Launfal, and compact of real matter and music. An ecstatic surrender to the moods of Nature discloses June as the first month of spring in New England, for "May is a pious fraud of the almanac."

> The season need but turn his hourglass round,
> And Winter suddenly, like crazy Lear,
> Reels back, and brings the dead May in his arms,
> Her budding breasts and wan dislustred front
> With frosty streaks and drifts of his white beard
> All overblown.

In June, the poet gives himself blithely to the druidical trees, "as old as life to me," and becomes a part of "the universal joy." His solitude is disturbed by the welcome footfall of a dusty tramp "who halts to unroll his bundle of strange food and munch an unearned meal."

> I bait him with my match-box and my pouch,
> Nor grudge the uncostly sympathy of smoke,
> His equal now, divinely unemployed.

Lowell, the darling of the lofty Saturday Club, is happy with "our barefoot Earl, by right of birth exonerate from toil." The sketches of the Scissors-grinder, of the children, of "the men who mend our village ways," are mellow passages in which Lowell's human heart is uninterrupted by bookishness.

One is again tempted to conjecture how far Lowell, the poet, might have advanced had not his eccentric, sociable nature carried him off elsewhere. His eighteen years' teaching at Harvard, the successive editorship of minor periodicals and of *The Atlantic* and *The North American,* the penning of numerous essays and book reviews and of countless letters, the frequent trips abroad, culminating in his ministry to Spain and to England—these are a bare outline of his activities. Could he have bent his restlessness to the art he loved best and given that art more of the critical power he bestowed elsewhere, Lowell would have left a richer collected song than the irregular, fitful flights so often destroyed by too many "isms tied together." One does

not ask for fewer isms, but for more beauty. Lowell wrote a number of odes in the manner of his adored Keats, but not even the famous "Commemoration Ode" vies with the nightingales and Grecian urns of the immortal lad overseas. Lowell had been chosen by Harvard as the poet to commemorate the loss of students who had died in the war, and he fretted over his poem some time before the solemn day. At ten o'clock of the evening before, he sat down in full frenzy and completed the poem at four in the morning. The late President Eliot recorded that, not Lowell's Ode, but the spontaneous prayer of the youthful Phillips Brooks was "the most impressive utterance of a proud and happy day." Doubtless, the average listener had been unable to follow the poet's elaborate flights through the patriotic, the ethical, the beautiful, the parenthetical. Some of the flights are superb, especially the tribute to Lincoln, a tribute that rises beside Whitman's pæans to the great leader. Nature, in planning Lincoln, pursued the deepest human pattern:

> For him her old-World moulds aside she threw,
> And, choosing sweet clay from the breast
> Of the unexhausted West,
> With stuff untainted shaped a hero new,
> Wise, steadfast in the strength of God, and true. . . .
>
> Great captains, with their guns and drums,
> Disturb our judgment for the hour,
> But at last silence comes;
> These all are gone, and, standing like a tower,
> Our children shall behold his fame,
> The kindly-earnest, brave, foreseeing man,
> Sagacious, patient, dreading praise, not blame,
> New birth of our new soil, the first American.

It is no one man Lowell bids us celebrate, "a hero half and half the whim of Fate,"

> But the pith and marrow of a Nation
> Drawing force from all her men—

"the heroes living and dear martyrs dead" who have made Lincoln great through his country. So deep was Lowell's joy in the

victory of the democratic Union that the final stanzas are addressed to his native land:

> What were our lives without thee?
> What all our lives to save thee?
> We reck not what we gave thee;
> We will not dare to doubt thee,
> But ask whatever else, and we will dare!

This persistent faith of Lowell's did not cause him to evade the evils he detected in the lamentable Reconstruction Period. Politicians had felt his steel before the war and they would do so again. His duality of vision and critical insight resembled Thomas Jefferson's. The father of the Declaration saw the seeds of future iniquity in the growing materialism of the race. As early as 1781, the great Democrat stated in his private "Notes On Virginia":

> It can never be too often repeated, that the time for fixing every essential right on a legal basis is while our rulers are honest, and ourselves united. From the conclusion of this war we shall be going down hill. It will not then be necessary to resort every moment to the people for support. They will be forgotten, therefore, and their rights disregarded. They will forget themselves, but in the sole faculty of making money, and will never think of uniting to effect a due respect for their rights. The shackles, therefore, which shall not be knocked off at the conclusion of this war, will remain with us long, will be made heavier and heavier, till our rights shall revive or expire in a convulsion.

Jefferson sighted the slavish elements in the human race at the very moment when it had almost won its liberty. Lowell, the apostle of the Union, discovered equally heartrending traits after the Union was saved and the birth of the nation was assured. As his career turned to the cause of his country, the hours for pure poetry diminished, much to his private chagrin. His letters, always the best of Lowell, tell us, for example, what he intended to write when he wrote his ode, "The Cathedral." When the long lines about Chartres exhaust us, we can turn to his letter to Howells, then at the head of *The Atlantic:* "You won't have room in your menagerie for such a displeaseyou-

saurus. The verses, if stretched end to end in a continuous line, would go clear round the Cathedral they celebrate, and nobody (I fear) the wiser. . . . There seems a bit of clean carving here and there, a solid buttress or two, and perhaps a gleam through painted glass. . . ." "The Cathedral" is a confession of Lowell's faith, not in the forms of the church and its relics, but in the "indwelling God." Lowell and his contemporaries had advanced beyond Calvinism on the one hand, and the sweeter aspects of Unitarianism on the other.

> 'Tis irrecoverable, that ancient faith,
> Homely and wholesome, suited to the time,
> With rod or candy for child-minded men . . .
> Each age must worship its own thought of God,
> More or less earthy, clarifying still
> With subsidence continuous of the dregs . . .

The old forms are a weariness, "and most that drowsy vacuum of compulsory prayer." Like Emerson, Lowell identified God, not with Christianity, but with Nature. And here is his version of the One in All and the All in One:

> Man cannot be God's outlaw if he would,
> Nor so abscond him in the caves of sense
> But Nature still shall search some crevice out
> With messages of splendor from that Source
> Which, dive he, soar he, baffles still and lures.

"The Cathedral," 1869, was followed by various memorial poems, the "Fourth Of July Ode" of 1876, and the volume, "Heartsease And Rue," notable for the ode to Agassiz. Among Lowell's many friends, none stood higher than the Swiss scientist who had come to Harvard, married an American woman and taken a lead among the affairs of Cambridge society. The fascinating tales and legends of the Saturday Club attest to the love and respect Agassiz roused in Emerson, Longfellow, Lowell, Holmes and its other notables. Skeptics are prone to eye the club with a view to branding it as an association of log-rollers. If these men were log-rollers, it was due to powerful common convictions that ruled the diverse temperaments they brought to Parker's. Lowell's ode is more than a tribute to

Agassiz, of whose sudden death he had learned while abroad. As in Emerson's "Adirondacks" and Longfellow's "Wayside Inn," Lowell embroidered on memories of a past in which so many old friends were concerned.

> Once more I see him at the table's head
> When Saturday her monthly banquet spread
> To scholars, poets, wits,
> All choice, some famous, loving things, not names,
> And so without a twinge at others' fames. . . .

In these lines lie the secret of the club's long life, a melancholy perspective for the present to ponder, with its literary politics and picayune jealousies. Lowell attributes the further success of the club to

> Natures benignly mixed of air and earth,
> Now with the stars and now with equal zest
> Tracing the eccentric orbit of a jest.

The poet fails to show how some of these jests made Emerson shrink. But he, the oldest of its members and the prime instigator of its founding, was unfailing in his attendance, though he had the longest journey to make from Concord to Boston and back. The ode has an undercurrent of mellow sorrow:

> It matters not; for, go at night or noon,
> A friend, whene'er he dies, has died too soon,
> And, once we hear the hopeless *He is dead,*
> So far as flesh hath knowledge, all is said.

More and more, in the declining years of the New England group, Lowell turned to his friends and they to him. Longfellow's poem on the poet absent from Elmwood is one of his loveliest, and even the witty little social bee, Dr. Holmes, was inconsolable. True to the custom of the time, Lowell wrote poems on the later birthdays of Bryant, of Whittier, of Holmes; and though he continued to dash off punning things on occasion, the ardent, inner man lurked behind the famous man of the world. Whatever fault one may find with the most restless, wayward and eccentric member of the old group, he remained loyal to their finest ideals and stands among these men as the

first purely American writer. If that writer was a better correspondent, essayist, satirist and diplomat than poet, certain passages still attest to the poet he was and the poet he might have become had he devoted his whole life to the art. Longfellow was the sole member of the group who could eventually afford to devote his whole time to poetry. But where Longfellow surpasses Lowell in the mass, Lowell is superior in the item. Both spent eighteen years of their lives at Harvard. Lowell, the broader, more brilliant scholar, was equally hampered by his learning. The books he read and committed to his marvelous memory interfered with the books he wrote, though he never lost sight, fundamentally, of the soil from which he had sprung nor the race to which he dedicated his heartiest energies. Longfellow was the more consistent artist, Lowell the more consistent humanist. A blending of these two friends would have developed a great lyric poet. As it is, though they remain the outstanding cultural pioneers of their time, their poetry lies among the ultimate disappointments of the golden era of which they were two of the most distinguished heirs.

XI

DR. HOLMES AND THE NEW ENGLAND DECLINE

I'm a florist in verse, and what would *people say,*
If I came to a banquet without a bouquet?
Oliver Wendell Holmes.

OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES christened *The Atlantic Monthly.* The genial little medico called his group the Brahmin caste, and his native Boston the Hub of the Solar System. Pride, as well as humor, begot these titles, for Holmes and his colleagues were descended from the first families of New England. Except for a youthful trip to Paris, where he studied medicine and developed his social graces, he rarely left Boston. His poetic endowment stemmed from "the Tenth Muse," Anne Bradstreet, and his social from Dorothy Quincy, the "grandmother's mother" he sketched in the dainty verses of Dorothy Q. Holmes was also a descendant of a long line of Calvinists, ending with his old-fashioned father, the minister, Abiel Holmes. Calvinism became the butt of the offspring's wittiest warfare. The moribund sect considered him the agent provocateur of Mephisto. Young Holmes embraced the Unitarianism of his radical peers without accepting its philosophic twin, Transcendentalism. Unable to shake off the creed of his forefathers, he fought it down to his last days. In "Over The Tea Cups," begun in his eightieth year, he could not resist a final fling at Jonathan Edwards and his brood.

In 1857, the birth-year of *The Atlantic,* Holmes issued the farcical One-Hoss Shay, a relentless survey of the breakdown of Calvinism. The strongest poem in the poet's collected work, where strength so seldom appears, it perpetuated his resentment. Holmes never escaped the Eighteenth Century to which his writings adhere. Esthetically, he could only react to Pope

and the rational grace of the French. Much though his own age concerned him in the realm of the new-born sciences, his collected poems are reactionary. One needs historical spectacles to bring them back to reality. Like all *vers-de-société,* they have merely a temporal interest and decline to a monotony closely akin to boredom. Dr. Holmes graced nearly every table on nearly every occasion called up by his charming environment. The poems he read aloud after dinners exerted a gay and precious influence. But the influence, like the poem, was occasional. None the less, the spirit of the Autocrat still sits at the heads of tables surrounded by subsequent writers of occasional verse. None of the later salon poets are as neat and natty as Holmes. We may laugh, grin or smile at the latest wit disporting himself in our literary circles or sophisticated journals. But for those who demand profounder perspectives, enjoyment is soon disenchanted. The clever birds who entertain us with melodious attacks on flaws of the human species are doomed to early oblivion. In this they resemble their brethren, the impassioned reformers, whose music is only potent so long as the thing attacked survives. Once it is pricked, the thing and its poem evaporate.

Even a cursory survey of Holmes' collected poems affords a staggering impression. Apparently, every other poem was the outcome of another invitation to dinner. Though the author himself, over his elderly tea cup, sadly insists that occasional poems require as much effort as deeper songs, Holmes is now the least important poet of his group. His verses are easy enough to read. There is no evidence of the slightest labor—an admirable feature. Nor does one have to read a poem a second time, there being nothing to add to the first impression. The ease of communication leads to the ready conclusion that technical facility is not the whole of poetry, any more than playing the right note at the right time is the whole of music. Without craftsmanship, a poet is at a loss with his reader; but the perfect craftsman with little to say suffers a still greater loss. The more awkward and meatier man outlives him in the fashion that the Whitman whom Holmes derided, completely outmoded the

Autocrat. It is strange that Holmes, so late in life, chafing under the restraints of Eighteenth Century metres and groaning under the paucity of English rhymes, did not turn to the leading exponent of a new and democratic poetic freedom. But the doctor, like most of his fellows, was an aristocrat for whom the Leaves were the mouthings of a barbarous animal. Yearning for greater freedom, he was even repelled by the graceless rhymes and rhythms of Emerson. Holmes could only respond to liberty so long as it confined itself to historical events affecting the destinies of his family: the Mayflower and Bunker Hill opened the road for his forefathers. Bring the battle out of the religious and civil into the art world, and the Brahmin was horrified. The convivial people for whom he chanted his verses were not Whitman's children of Adam. Such children were too lusty for gentlemanly gatherings. If they wore any clothes, they were certainly not evening clothes. Nor had they any kinship with the college of which Holmes was so clearly the norm that he may well be called the Poet Laureate of Harvard.

The lovable humorist belonged to the class of '29: fifty-nine graduates many of whom rose to high places in the nation. Holmes missed only one or two of the class reunions, and closed each meeting with an apt memorial. Sadness occasioned by the thinning of the ranks tints the later memorials; the thirty-sixth variation sinks to the wistful refrain:

> So let us meet as eve draws nigh,
> And life matures and mellows,
> Till Nature whispers with a sigh,
> "Good-night, my dear old fellows!"

When the humorist descends to the serious, he touches the sentimental. Most of the Harvard poems are that and little more. The first and most famous, "Bill And Joe," 1851, gains its endearing charm through variations on the refrain, "When you were Bill and I was Joe," and arrives at the elegiac coda:

> No matter; while our home is here
> No sounding name is half so dear;
> When fades at length our lingering day,
> Who cares what pompous tombstones say?

Read on the hearts that love us still,
Hic jacet Joe. *Hic jacet* Bill.

Some of the class poems have a rollicking swing—

Has there any old fellow got mixed with the boys?
If there has, take him out, without making a noise.

Others refer to topics reflecting the Civil War. Still others, starred and initialed, embrace some classmate who has died since the last meeting. 1873 stars and initials three men at once; and "The Last Survivor," 1878, propounds the query:

Yes! the vacant chairs tell sadly we are going, going fast,
And the thought comes strangely o'er me who will live to be the last?

Holmes had survived all but three of the original fifty-nine; and survived all the poets of his era, including toward the end, Lowell, Whittier and Whitman. The class poems were not his sole contribution to Harvard history. He was often called upon to address some college function, beginning with the Centennial Celebration of 1836. He also recited poems for the inauguration of President Everett, meetings of the Alumni, the Commemoration Services of 1865, various Commencement dinners, the 250th anniversary of the founding of Harvard. The last of the class poems, "The Angel-Thief," was composed in 1888. Better than any biographical study, a list or partial list of Holmes' other poems gives rounded evidence of the regard in which he was held. Here are some of the public and private occasions he decorated: A dinner to Dickens, a temperance dinner, the dedication of the Pittsfield Cemetery; meetings of the American Medical Association, of the Berkshire Horticultural Society, of the Boston Bric-a-brac Club; birthday tributes to Whittier, Lowell, Webster, Bryant, Mrs. Stowe, dirges on the deaths of Sumner, Longfellow, Lowell, Whittier; *Atlantic* and Saturday Club dinners, dinners to the Prince Napoleon, the Grand Duke Alexis, General Grant, Admiral Farragut, the Chinese and Japanese Embassies. Well might the octogenarian conclude:

If all the trees in all the woods were men;
And each and every blade of grass a pen;

If every leaf on every shrub and tree
Turned to a sheet of foolscap; every sea
Were changed to ink, and all earth's living tribes
Had nothing else to do but act as scribes,
And for ten thousand ages, day and night,
The human race should write, and write, and write,
Till all the pens and paper were used up,
And the huge inkstand was an empty cup,
Still would the scribblers clustered round its brink
Call for more pens, more paper, and more ink.

These refreshing lines are typical of the Autocrat's unfailing humor. Americans, alas too often, consider humor their highest and most original virtue—the only virtue, according to the mournful Henry James, we can lay claim to. But humor is an important factor in poetry, and essential to the balanced poet. A man who sits down to tragic writing had better guard himself against pomposity by the intercession of a divine humor, not active in the tragedy but implicit in his many-sided and perfectly cadenced handling of the theme. Humor then exerts the insight and restraints of an ego cognizant of the final form the work must achieve. But humor employed for its own sake tends to an habitual lightheadedness blind to the undercurrents of existence and experience. It then becomes, not the expression of a mellow worlding, but of an all-too-glib, parochial "Frog-pondian."

Of Holmes' humorous poems, those tinged with sentiment are best: "My Aunt," "Dorothy Q," "To A Blank Sheet Of Paper," "The Ballad Of The Oysterman," "The Opening Of The Piano." Of the frankly funny, composed of nonsense and slapstick, "The Height Of The Ridiculous" shows the drastic effect on his servant of some "merry" lines of the poet. The servant falls in a fit, and Holmes determines never again "to write as funny as I can." "Nux Postcrematica" is a satire on the troubles besetting a physician who interjects humor into his rounds. "The Stethoscope Song" and "The Stability Of Science" are among the other medical parodies. Of the poems derisive of Calvinism, "The Moral Bully" is fully as grandiose as "The Deacon's Masterpiece," and is more direct in its vituperative parade of a preacher's

hypocritical virtues. The satires on continued invitations to after-dinner speaking are decidedly autobiographical. Of the numerous patriotic poems, most of them occasional, the plea which saved the good ship Constitution was matched later in life by the plea in behalf of the Old South Church. Most of the poems of this group are marred by inflated rhetoric, while the Civil War poems, like Longfellow's, are vastly inferior to those of Whittier and Lowell. In a lighter and more sentimental patriotic mood, Holmes wrote better things: "Grandmother's Story Of Bunker Hill" and "Brother Jonathan's Lament For Sister Caroline."

On the whole, the poet came closer to poetry in his Yankee character sketches. Begotten of sentiment, drollery and a final pathetic moral, "The Last Leaf," written early in life, shows how Holmes might have grown had he not immersed his talents in too much sociability. The poem is couched in the old-fashioned grace of his beloved Eighteenth Century. The youthful singer has a tendency to smile at an old relic when

> The pavement stones resound,
> And he totters o'er the ground
> With his cane.

His grandmamma had assured him that the relic was once the owner of a Roman nose.

> But now his nose is thin,
> And it rests upon his chin
> Like a staff,
> And a crook is in his back,
> And a melancholy crack
> In his laugh.

Though the poet cannot help grinning at the old, three-cornered hat, a vision of his own future causes him to conclude:

> And if I should live to be
> The last leaf upon the tree
> In the spring,
> Let them smile, as I do now
> At the old forsaken bough
> Where I cling.

These lines might serve as a genial epitaph on the poet. He was the last leaf of the New England renascence, and still more intimately of the Calvinistic tree. Holmes was the second American of distinction to pursue an escapist philosophy. Longfellow roamed the high seas and the courts of Europe in order to broaden the culture of his race; Holmes fled back to a former century, or in truth had never escaped it. Holmes diluted the fire and passion of real poets to the niceties of graceful logic. He wrote with the intellect and touches only the intellect. When he descended to the heart, he evoked the sweeter, softer, most sentimental chords. He is therefore the palest leaf, as well, of the independent Puritan tree which gave us Bryant, Emerson, Whittier, Lowell and Emily Dickinson.

Of the minor poets contemporary with Emerson at one end and Lowell and Holmes at the other, those who adopted Transcendentalism had more importance than the followers of Longfellow. Though Emerson derided sycophancy, he unconsciously admired a number of men and women who were inspired by him, and tolerated some of the grotesque effigies of his own findings. And yet, the findings of a master are often incompletely expressed; the hints and stray ends are seized and strung together by his uninvited disciples. A complete survey of Transcendentalism consults the disciples along with the prophet. Indeed, a handful of the minor poems, written by different poets, give us a perfect summary of the ramifications of a movement so national in the influence it brought to bear on Nineteenth Century America.

It has been noted how this influence paled into twilight after the close of the Civil War, and how, when a racial problem has been fairly well solved, it has little further interest for posterity. Transcendentalism had insisted on the individual liberties of Man, on his oneness with the Whole, on the presence in his own being of the Oversoul; and it was associated with Democracy in behalf of a greater and more lasting union of the states. Most of its reforms, in British or Brahmin fashion, were directed elsewhere than at home—at the slavery supposedly existing only

in the South. That slavery could also exist in the North, quite apart from the black race, was a problem reserved for the children of industrialism. In the realm of the spirit, an intense reaction set in against the aristocratic individualism of the Transcendentalists and the gospel of self-reliance preached by Emerson with too little regard for his neighbors. Paradoxically, the Revolutionary forefathers' battle for liberty had engendered the very love of aristocratic independence, reaching its height in the middle Nineteenth Century. When the social ideals of the Union were threatened by the seceding states, the Northern individualists were the first to cry out and give battle.

At the heart of the reformers lay an intense love of country and a desire for a national expression in the written records of the spirit. But individualism was the real keynote of the group which Emerson headed, and it led to that Brahminism to which Holmes had called humorous attention. On the religious side, the preposterous lengths to which the Unitarians, and their philosophic and poetic brethren, the Transcendentalists, carried their optimistic beliefs, pulled the pendulum of faith too far toward Man. Transcendentalism, horrified by the littleness of Man under Calvinism, and the evil charged to his hopeless soul, insisted upon his dignity and claimed most passionately that God could only be discovered in Man and Man in God. Nature herself, though a mirror of the godhead, was an unreasoning entity incapable of expressing the Overlord or the Oversoul: a task allotted to the children of Adam. And they had developed a soul which contained the body, not the body the soul. The body, truth to tell, was virtually the same instrument of sin the Calvinists had claimed it to be. There is almost no reference to the body per se in Transcendental literature, or in the whole of American poetry before the advent of Whitman. It remained for that barbarian to revive and to chant its glories.

In analyzing some of the poetry of the minor Transcendentalists, we detect the virtues and vices of the movement in general. The virtues gave birth to the vices whenever philosophy and didacticism were overstressed at the expense of poetry and beauty. Poetry and beauty did not contain the philosophy and

didacticism—as in Wordsworth. Emerson himself was a poet who wrote philosophy, and, whenever some awkward moment, occasioned by intoxicated flights into the empyrean, was overcome, he wrote poetry rarely equaled or surpassed by later Americans. His immediate followers sought not the influence of the poet, but of the preacher; nor had they the man's genius in any respect. It is not until we reach the poetic prose of Thoreau and the poems of Emily Dickinson that we find how magically Emerson could sway the future. We shall find it again in the debt Whitman had no hesitation in acknowledging.

Foremost among the immediate circle looms the delightful dean of Transcendentalism, and author of the Brook Farm experiment, Amos Bronson Alcott. Born in the last year of the Eighteenth Century, this garrulous deliverer of the famous Orphic or "awful" sayings, talked on until 1888. Just why Emerson's old neighbor and companion took to poetry is a mystery. Lowell's Fable had shown what happened to him "if you shut him up closely with pen, ink and paper." In "Approaching God," Alcott opens the core of Transcendental individualism in the absurd line: "And in thy Being's being be." In "Man," he shapes a gnarled little piece proclaiming the omnipresence of his fellows without whom,

> Cosmos from Chaos were not spoken,
> And God bereft of visible token.

The lines on "Excellence" are excellent in all respects but poetry. After asking what is the chief good in Man—good being now the sole concern—the Orphic dreamer propounds the following:

> Or is't a tart idea, to procure
> An edge, and keep the practice soul in ure
> Like that dear chymic dust, or puzzling quadrature?

"The Seer's Rations" are anything but common. The potion is mixed of sunbeams, spring waters, mead's creams, sweet ethers and morals idyllic. Much of this must have been diluted from one of the old fellow's morning visits to Emerson. In a sequence of adoring sonnets to the latter, an endearing portrait of the two friends is limned—doubtless out of their youth. After fore-

noons in which "we two did toss from lip to lip" Plato and Plotinus, they go through the fields to Walden Pond. Emerson is described

> . . . with gesture quick
> Rhymes deftly in mid-air with circling stick,
> Skims the smooth pebbles from the leafy shore,
> Or deeper ripples raises as we lave;
> Nor slumb'rous pillow touches late at night,
> Till converse with the stars his eyes invite.

Emerson thought highly of the verses of Thoreau. It is not to these we turn for the genuine poet he was, but to "Walden," "The Maine Woods," "Cape Cod," the letters and diaries. Here we discern how readily Thoreau made Emerson his own, how he took the older man out of doors, in writing as well as in living. The eccentric hermit carried the Emersonian doctrines of independence and self-reliance far beyond their original intentions. In an attempt to find a freer form in poetry, Thoreau, like Longfellow, tried experiments antedating the free verse movement. In either case, the results have merely an historical value. Thoreau's poems are too erratic or artless, but they contain a meaty seriousness absent from the Longfellow School. "Inspiration," "The Fisher's Boy," "My Prayer," "Rumors From An Æolian Harp" and "The Inward Morning" demonstrate Thoreau's promise as a poet. Like Emerson, he had the power of saying much in little.

> Great God, I ask thee for no meaner pelf
> Than that I may not disappoint myself;
> That in my action I may soar as high
> As I can now discern with this clear eye.

The hard-headed Yankee in Thoreau gave a practical turn to the theories of the time. He shared this commonsense with Emerson. Had he lived beyond forty-five, the hermit might have produced poetry on a larger and more memorable scale. But there are always the prose books, and these abound in some of the most realistic poetry in American literature.

Emerson's "soul-mate," the gifted Margaret Fuller, was distinguished for her womanly independence, her leadership of *The*

Dial, and the critical papers she contributed to George Ripley's *New York Tribune.* Her poems, half mad though they are, reveal the extent to which Transcendentalism could run. So completely does "Life A Temple" capture the bounding self that one recalls the "tremendous Me" attributed to Margaret Fuller. This ecstatic ego sounds still louder in "Dryad Song": "I am immortal! I know it! I feel it!" In "Sub Rosa, Crux," she adds a faith in Christ to her faith in Unitarianism. This poem, probably her best, is a tribute to the Knights of the Rosy Cross, the Rosicrucians. Margaret Fuller, like Thoreau, was cut down in the midst of her powers. She was lost at sea at the age of forty.

With the next poet, we revert to the octogenarians and to one of the most accomplished Transcendentalists. In "Gnosis," Christopher Pearse Cranch discloses the isolated state of the individual in society:

> We are spirits clad in veils;
> Man by man was never seen;
> All our deep communing fails
> To remove the shadowy screen.
>
> Heart to heart was never known;
> Mind with mind did never meet;
> We are columns left alone
> Of a temple once complete. . . .

The only hope for companionship lies with God, the gentle divine goes on, and concludes his lyric with the same harmoniously sustained simplicity of diction and cadence. Cranch published several volumes of poetry and a translation of the Æneid. "I In Thee And Thou In Me" is a further expression of the duality of God and Man; and in "So Far, So Near," the poet, though an ordained preacher, followed Emerson's belief that God cannot be personified:

> Though all human races claim thee,
> Thought and language fail to name thee,
> Mortal lips be dumb before thee,
> Silence only can adore thee!

Cranch eventually gave up the pulpit for painting and poetry. William Ellery Channing, nephew of the great divine, was another octogenarian who issued several volumes of verse. One of Emerson's intimates, Channing was a less accomplished poet than Cranch. The following stanza entitles Channing to recognition:

> O Time! O Death! I clasp you in my arms,
> For I can soothe an infinite cold sorrow,
> And gaze contented on your icy charms,
> And that wild snow-pile which we call to-morrow;
> Sweep on, O soft, and azure-lidded sky,
> Earth's waters to your gentle gaze reply.

This buoyant conviction is extended in "Hymn Of The Earth," "Nature," and "Primavera, The Breath Of Spring." An even more transcendent Me than Margaret Fuller's comes out of Frederic Henry Hedge, a minister whose "Questionings" borrow a Kantian query—

> Hath this world, without me wrought,
> Other substance than my thought?
> Lives it by my sense alone,
> Or by essence of its own?

Like a true child of independent New England, Hedge is not content with these beginnings, but pursues his own image:

> Doth yon fireball, poised in air,
> Hang by my permission there?
> Are the clouds that wander by
> But the offspring of mine eye . . .

and so on, until we learn:

> Now I close my eyes, my ears
> And creation disappears;
> Yet if I but speak the word,
> All creation is restored. . . .

This rapturous optimism pervades the other minor Transcendentalists, and finds its loftiest feminine counterpart in Ellen Hooper, the youngest of the group surrounding Emerson

and his "soul-mate." Emerson encouraged her, Colonel Higginson called her "a woman of genius," and Miss Fuller wrote: "I have seen in Europe no woman more gifted by nature than she." Mrs. Hooper died at the age of thirty-six. In her poems, Duty is placed above Beauty—

> The straightest path perhaps which may be sought,
> Lies through the great highway men call, "I ought."

Along with Duty, Labor receives garlands from this poet. Nobility belongs not to the well-born, but to the chimney-sweep. Of all the poems to Emerson, hers is the most appealing. No description of the bard is more inclusive than the quatrain:

> Thou art the mountain where we climb to see
> The land our feet have trod this many a year.
> Thou art the deep and crystal winter sky
> Where noiseless, one by one, bright stars appear.

Mrs. Hooper's sister, Caroline Tappan, the less distinguished of "the Sturgis sisters," and Eliza Scudder and Helen Hunt Jackson, author of "Ramona," round out the feminine branch of the Transcendental tree. Among the remaining men who wrote poetry, most won distinction in other fields: Charles A. Dana, for some years the brilliant editor of *The New York Sun,* George William Curtis, about whom the phrase "sweetness and light" was coined, Theodore Parker, the renowned Unitarian minister and radical, David Atwood Wasson, another polemical preacher, and Thomas Wentworth Higginson, founder of the Boston Symphony Orchestra and the friend and editor of Emily Dickinson. One outstanding name remains—the finest among the minor Transcendentalists—Jones Very.

Very was apparently a darling of Emerson's. He is always referred to with special delight in the Journal. His poems are usually in the Shakesperean sonnet form, with an extra foot, or Alexandrine, in the last line. They are notable for their pure mysticism, their precise clarity and the sure strength of their versification. Emerson edited Very's poems and essays in 1839. Ordained for the ministry, Very turned to poetry as the better pulpit for his preaching. He looked upon his most inconsequen-

tial act as a response to heavenly guidance, and his rapt, disembodied spirit earned the sobriquet, "hermit thrush." Of the dependence of the body on the soul for health, Very wrote characteristic verses. In the sonnet on Nature, the omnipresent Me is linked with Miss Fuller's and Hedge's:

> The bubbling brook doth leap when I come by . . .
> The birds know when the friend they love is nigh. . . .

This confidence, supported by a fancied insight into the minds of lower animals and inanimate things, shows how far Transcendentalism could lure its devotees. The inner light disclosing the secret God to the brooding ego is described in "The Presence." This sonnet wears the homely, monkish habit of the Middle Ages, and epitomizes the heart of Transcendentalism:

> I sit within my room, and joy to find
> That Thou who always lovs't art with me here,
> That I am never left by Thee behind,
> But by thyself Thou keeps't me ever near;
> The fire burns brighter when with Thee I look,
> And seems a kinder servant sent to me;
> With gladder heart I read Thy holy book,
> Because Thou art the eyes by which I see;
> This aged chair, that table, watch and door
> Around in ready service ever wait;
> Nor can I ask of Thee a menial more
> To fill the measure of my large estate,
> For Thou thyself, with all a father's care,
> Where'er I turn, art ever with me there.

Little remains of the other New England minor poets whose work appeared before the Civil War. As anthology succeeded anthology, more and more names vanished. Certain single poems, most of them household favorites, have survived. Albert Gorton Greene holds a place for his droll poem on "Old Grimes." It resembles the Yankee types popularized by the Autocrat, and is a sketchy forerunner of the full-length portraits introduced by Robinson and Frost. William Lloyd Garrison is chiefly remembered as the impassioned Abolitionist and founder of *The Liberator*. He published a volume, "Sonnets And Poems," dedi-

cated to Freedom. Nathaniel Hawthorne's only poems were contributed to Griswold's "Scenes In The Life Of Our Saviour." The supreme literary artist of New England, Hawthorne was indubitably a poet in prose. "The Star Of Calvary" carries some of that artistry into verse. Harriet Beecher Stowe was another writer more distinguished for her novels. She issued a volume of "Religious Poems" in 1865. The best devotional verse of the period, such as "The Rock Of Ages," was composed by the Baptist clergyman Samuel Francis Smith, author of the national hymn, "America." The devotional poems of the Episcopal Bishops, George Washington Doane and his son, likewise belong to this period.

Among those who owed their main inspiration to Longfellow, the most active were William Wetmore Story, Thomas William Parsons and Rose Terry Cooke. Admirable though the continued search for an esthetic basis in poetry, it had not yet escaped a complete subjection to European themes and cultures. Story spent the greater part of his life in Italy and pursued his dual career of sculptor and poet in a pallid rendering of Grecian and Roman classics. "Cleopatra," his best known poem, is marred by a Puritanical smoothening of the voluptuous queen. Her portrait is Amazonian, but the description of her animal strength and sadistic appetites descends to unconscious humor in her demand for a mate as wild as herself. In tigerish guise, she recalls such a mate in the jungles:

> We toyed in the amber moonlight,
> Upon the warm flat sand,
> And struck at each other our massive arms—
> How powerful he was and grand!

The last line sounds like the sigh of a shop girl and the closing stanza, beginning with "Come to my arms, my hero!" belongs to the school of Elinor Glyn. Parsons visited Europe in his seventeenth year. His adoration of Italy resulted in a translation of Dante's "Inferno." The rest of his time was devoted to the study of dentistry, a profession he practiced in London and Boston. Dr. Parsons published several volumes of verse, and

a definitive edition appeared shortly after his death. A better poet than Story, his work is hampered by too many excursions into Longfellowian sentimentality.

> Finding Francesca full of tears, I said,
> "Tell me thy trouble." "Oh, my dog is dead!
> Murdered by poison!—no one knows for what—
> Was ever dog born capable of that?"

Faced with realities, Parsons, like his master, could reach the silliest deductions. Out of his vast reading, he could also cull a poem as good in its way as "On A Bust Of Dante," or the lines to a lark, prefaced by a quotation from the Paradiso. But this pæan to Longfellow droops a little beside the Italian original: "*Dell' ultima dolcezza che la sazia.*" Rose Terry Cooke was one of the many feminine disciples of the Cambridge poet. Better remembered for her New England stories, she issued a book of poems dripping with banalities certain of contemporary favor. An echo of Longfellow's *Wanderlust* is the refrain of her most popular poem:

> My body is in Segovia,
> But my soul is in Madrid!

In viewing the leading branches of the New England tradition, it becomes increasingly apparent that the Emersonian was more deeply rooted than the Longfellowian. Emerson never had to leave Concord to feel the universe, while Longfellow brooded among dreams and fantasies that rarely touched life at first hand, even among his European peregrinations. The future of American poetry lay more and more in the path of the great rebel and pioneer. The decline of Transcendentalism was due to the faults of the system, to the more immediate concerns of the new industrial age and to the spirit of adventure roused by the call to the further conquest and cultivation of western frontiers. The while effete New England sailed abroad, the more sturdy Puritan sons, still in the grasp of a pioneer will, plowed and settled the Middle-West out of which the next generation of original writers arose. With the divine exception of the evening star of New England, Emily Dickinson, and of

the garrulous democrat, Whitman, the average Nineteenth Century poetry fell into correct traditional molds. But New England had not gone to the grave for good. On the eve and in the dawn of a new century, several independent figures quietly emerged. They brought a fresh, artistic challenge to the nation and through them one sees again that the spirit of New England is a deathless entity.

XII

POETS OF THE OLD SOUTH

I am lit with the Sun.
Sidney Lanier.

THE imagination of an American humanist is certain to be permanently stirred by a visit to the old South, or more literally, to those states which have not been visibly altered by the inroads of progress setting in with industrialism. A visit above all to Virginia, birthplace of Washington, Jefferson and Robert E. Lee, will give the detached Northerner a melancholy vista. He can still see ample evidence of the ravages of the Civil War, and, where mansions and grounds remain, trace the ghosts of an old aristocracy. He will find the drastic waste brought about by the passionate Yankee reformers, and, if his eye looks ahead as well, he will find that a society, raised on the dark backs of slavery, has a later Northern counterpart in a bourgeois régime raised on the backs of white industrialism. A humanist is a patriot at home as well as abroad, and condemns his own evils before he attacks those farther removed. His intelligence discovers in the South, especially during the Rebellion, not a divorced society so much as a group of states distinctly and decisively a part of the Union. In Dr. Holmes' ballad, "Brother Jonathan's Lament For Sister Caroline," we read a satirist's view of this kinship.

In approaching the poetry of the old South, popular error must be deleted. The best of Southern poetry is not regional, but national: the most impassioned outpourings in behalf of the Southern cause are as much the property of the race as the patriotic poems of Whittier and Lowell. Per contra, the dispassionate lover of art must eschew the sectional sentiment many Southerners fall into in discussing their own literature. Fortunately, with the advent of the latest renascence in American

letters—the Southern renascence—Southern authors and critics have voiced the frankest self-criticism, and, in a concerted effort to give their section a realistic instead of a glossy interpretation, have started a movement whose manifold forms are intensive and extensive. Southern material, with its vast store of ideals, actions, customs, memories, is as rich as any other American material, and Southern writers are shaping it to an ever-growing gallery of notable poems, plays and novels.

In reviewing the early annals of the South, one notes how far its writers lagged behind New England writers—but not so far as the average critic supposes. It needs to be said again that the backwardness of the American race with respect to literature was due to the more immediate concerns of religious and political freedom. While the New England genius first devoted itself to religion, the Southern gave itself to politics. Though the earliest steps against Britain were achieved in the North, the new nation owed its first constructive leaders to Virginia: Washington, Jefferson, Madison and others. Out of the Virginian aristocracy, slowly forming from the beginning, a baronial power emerged, and out of this power came an instinct for property and a defense of the rights of property through the enactment and upholding of laws. Along with this genius for making laws arose a landed culture, reaching its height in the architectural and literary graces of Jefferson. The cultural activities of the landed gentry, considered in the mass, were reflective rather than creative, and a race which left the tilling of the soil to imported African slaves was, in many respects, farther from earth than the workers in the fields. Negro spirituals are therefore more indigenous than any other early writings of the South. None the less, in a land devoted first to the liberties of the race, and then to their statement and consecration through the Declaration and Constitution, there was poetry: the poetry of action supported by the poetry of prose. One is reminded of John Smith's slogan: "Pens wrote what their swords did."

There is another reason for the comparative dearth of old Southern poetry. The leading literary market places were centred in New York, Philadelphia and Boston. Richmond,

Charleston and Baltimore had markets on a smaller scale, but none ever grew to literary capitals. The South had no lasting magazines and publishing houses. Poe, in the heart of Richmond, constantly dreamed of Northern capitals and finally left the city of his adoption, virtually for good. All Southern writers, up to recent years, had to look to the North for recognition and criticism. The early Southern poet, isolated from the stimulus afforded to writers in colder climates, followed his muse in leisurely hours. With the arrival of the Charleston poets under William Gilmore Simms, literature was pursued as an art in itself. But these men were tragically hampered by ill health, by the Civil War, and by the ravages which thrust them into poverty or an early demise. The average Yankee poet, protected from any warfare but that of the pen, and living behind the conquest of the South, enjoyed a patriarchal age. The average Southern poet "went forth to battle" and was left, crushed in every way but the spirit. Henry Timrod, the shining star of Carolina in battle and defeat, looms beside Whittier as the poet of the war. And the spirit in which his friend, Paul Hamilton Hayne, gave his life to reconstructing the ties between South and North, is another revelation of the genius of Secessionism. Wasted by the war and feeling its effects for years to come, the South was much slower to return to the pen than the North. Simms, Timrod, Hayne, and finally Lanier, were destroyed in turn, and poetry lay in the grave for a long time.

Before the advent of the Charleston group and the founding in Richmond of *The Southern Literary Messenger,* Southern poetry came in sporadic spurts. After the poem on Bacon's Rebellion, nothing of distinction arose for many years, and the names we revert to are rarely more than names. St. George Tucker, stepfather of the great John Randolph of Roanoke, is remembered for fugitive pieces of a derivative and sentimental nature. Richard Henry Wilde, born in Dublin, came to America at the age of seven, and was identified with Georgia and New Orleans. A member of the bar and of Congress, Wilde never lost his talent for Irish melancholy, as the stanzas, "My life is like a summer rose," attest. His sonnet, "To The Mocking-

Bird," is a zestful portrait of the protean character of the "sportive satirist of Nature's school." Washington Allston, though born in South Carolina, is identified with Boston, in the same sense that Poe, born in Boston, is identified with the South. The state of Maryland developed three early poets: Dr. John Shaw, Francis Scott Key and Edward Coate Pinkney. Shaw, a remarkable linguist, antedated Bryant and Longfellow in translating foreign authors. His own poems derive from Eighteenth Century English lyrism. It is impossible to discuss Key's "Star-Spangled Banner" as a contribution to the art of poetry. Written under glamorous conditions, the lines are difficult to commit to memory, and are set to a British tune beyond the range of the average human voice. Poem and air have persisted, and will doubtless persist until some simpler, more natural song catches the affections of the race. It is not until we come to Pinkney (1802-1828) that we reach a Southern poet of distinction. Even here, the talent is mostly derivative, and slight and rococo compared with Timrod and Lanier. Had Pinkney lived longer, his exquisite abilities would have carried him beyond the few charming lyrics he is remembered by. Despite chronic ill health, he must have been a fiery gentleman. At twenty, after serving six years in the American navy (he was born in London), he challenged his commander to a duel and was forced to resign. A few years later, while trying to enlist in the Mexican army, then fighting for independence, he killed a Mexican in a duel and had to escape. Smitten with illness and poverty, he accepted, without salary, a post at the University of Maryland, and became the editor of *The Marylander.* The only volume published during his lifetime, "Rodolph And Other Poems," gained some recognition and a modicum of sales. His lines to Italy, "Know'st thou the land which lovers ought to choose?" show an indebtedness to Goethe, and to Byron and Coleridge. At twenty-two, Pinkney married Georgiana McCarsland, the young lady who is said to have inspired his delicate "Serenade." A rival to this claim, and to his other love songs, was the Baltimore belle, Mary Hawkins, whom the young poet loved in vain. According to further gossip, a Mrs. Rebecca

Somerville inspired what is perhaps his best lyric: the drinking song, "A Health."

I fill this cup to one made up
  Of loveliness alone,
A woman, of her gentle sex,
  The seeming paragon;
To whom the better elements
  And kindly stars have given
A form so fair, that, like the air,
  'Tis less of earth than heaven. . . .

The bellicose Georgian poet, Mirabeau Buonaparte Lamar, was likewise noted for gallantry to the ladies. In 1835, he fought for Texan independence and rose to the presidency of the young republic. He also fought in the Mexican War, and became American minister to Argentine, Costa Rica and Nicaragua. Lamar's "Verse Memorials," according to Professor Trent, contain "the most extraordinary repository of extempore effusions addressed by a gallant gentleman to lovely ladies in the whole range of our literature." Nor did the General confine himself to Southern belles. A minor galaxy of Mexicans were celebrated, and the lady from whom he had to part in his best known poem, "The Daughter Of Mendoza," was a native of Central America. Another bellicose Georgian, Dr. Thomas Holley Chivers, is famous for his warfare on Edgar Allan Poe and famous for nothing else. The author of ten volumes now difficult of access, the eccentric Chivers was captain of the regiment of disappointed poets who charged Poe with plagiarism. Chivers is one of the grandest curios in American literature. The "Rosalie Lee" from which Poe was accused of stealing "Annabel Lee" runs as follows:

Many mellow Cydonian Suckets,
  Sweet apples, anthosmial, divine,
From the Ruby-rimmed Beryline buckets,
  Star-gemmed, lily-shaped, hyaline—
Like that sweet golden goblet found growing
  On the wild emerald Cucumber-tree—
Rich, brilliant, like Chrysopraz blowing—
  I then brought to my Rosalie Lee—

To my lamb-like Rosalie Lee—
To my Dove-like Rosalie Lee—
To my beautiful, dutiful Rosalie Lee.

William Gilmore Simms was born in Charleston in 1806, and published a volume of verse at twenty. He was practically the only early Southerner to devote himself exclusively to literature, and in the course of forty years projected the largest host of poems, novels, plays, biographies and histories—more than fifty volumes. He was in touch with Northern, as well as Southern authors, and rose to national prominence. He attempted to found the first purely Southern magazines. His first ventures failed; not until he took over *The Southern Quarterly Review* and *Russell's Magazine* did success attend his editorial effort. Simms was the figure around whom Timrod and Hayne revolved; like them he gave his ardent heart to the cause of Secession. The war brought the greatest losses to Simms, a country gentleman. Some of his children, most of his friends, his whole property, went down with the fallen cause. He bravely survived the war by five years, wrote with continued industry, and helped every Southern author he could get in touch with. It is obvious that Simms was too busy to perfect his poetry. Compared with Timrod's and Hayne's, his poems sound vague and literary: his thematic material was often too remote from reality. Even the popular lyric, "The Lost Pleiad," is rather rhetorical. It stresses the evanescence of the loveliest things, a fate Simms had occasion to experience many times.

Timrod and Hayne were considerably younger than Simms. The former invites comparison with Poe and Lanier and stands next to them in the early Southern order. Like Pinkney, he was hampered by poor health and poverty. Timrod had to earn what he could as a private tutor. He contributed to *The Literary Messenger* and to *Russell's*, and not until 1860 did he publish a volume—in Boston. Though he enlisted, his chief service to the Confederacy came out of "The Cotton Boll," "Charleston," "Carolina" and other poems written early in the war. Because of frail health, he was sent back from the battle front. Consumption slowly stole his life, but not the fire of his poetry.

Two years after the Surrender, he died—according to Trent: "correcting the proof-sheets of his own poems, and he passed away with them at his side, stained with his life-blood." The last of his poems was the beautiful ode to the Confederate dead at Magnolia Cemetery. For nobility, restraint of diction and a peaceful aftermath, this ode takes precedence over Northern war odes, and might well mark the grave of Timrod himself.

> Sleep sweetly in your humble graves,
> Sleep, martyrs of a fallen cause;
> Though yet no marble column craves
> The pilgrim here to pause. . . .

An original vein saturates the poet's handling of Nature. The human background comes forward in a slow crescendo; suddenly the South looms and is spurred into action. The chant to Spring opens with a lightly swinging cadence in which the "nameless pathos" prevalent in the air gathers momentum in the "deep heart" of forest trees, and finds first melodies in crocus, snowdrop and violet. Suddenly, the "call of Death" is heard. The Spring, "for all her tranquil charms," rouses "a million men to arms."

> Oh! standing on this desecrated mould,
> Methinks that I behold,
> Lifting her bloody daisies up to God,
> Spring kneeling on the sod,
>
> And calling, with the voice of all her rills,
> Upon the ancient hills
> To fall and crush the tyrants and the slaves
> Who turn her meads to graves.

There is more than a patriot in these lines; they are the work of an artist. The same method is developed in the better known, though inferior ode, "The Cotton Boll." Like Lowell's impassioned utterances, it piles images on images to the point of vagueness. When the martial note enters, the lines rise to a moving vision and a poignancy broader than Lowell's. The irregular measures undulate with cadences rare in early American poetry, and the lengthening of lines toward the close is dramatically

effective. The poem on Carolina is notable for its haunting refrain and the mounting dignity of lines in groups of threes.

> The despot treads thy sacred sands,
> Thy pines give shelter to his bands,
> Thy sons stand by with idle hands,
> Carolina!

The poet invokes heroic memories of the Revolution to inflame the idlers into action. Inside the restraint of the chosen form, the emotion gathers and strengthens. One feels the response, "from Sachem's head to Sumter's wall," of the ten times ten thousand men who must fall to save the soil. At the heart of these stanzas, as elsewhere in Timrod, we get glimpses of Charleston. The poem on his native city has an appeal as proud as the old town itself. To the query, will the future find her still resting "in the strong arms of her palm crowned isles," Timrod replies:

> We know not; in the temple of the Fates
> God has inscribed her doom:
> And, all untroubled in her faith, she waits
> The triumph or the tomb.

Hayne collected and edited his chum's poems in 1873. By no means as gifted as Timrod, he should be treasured for his landscapes of the South. He was the Nature poet of the group. His best war poem, "Vicksburg," is inferior to Timrod's richer vein. Surviving until 1886, Hayne had time to write more poems and issue more volumes than his schoolmate; like Timrod, he deserves better luck with posterity. Still, informative though his poems are, with their skillful modeling of varied English metres, they lack the intensity which gave more than mortal breath to Timrod's poetry. Descriptions of Nature, unrelieved by the human tone, tend to monotony. And yet, how vivid the Southern mood in this quatrain from "Aspects Of The Pines":

> Tall, sombre, grim, against the morning sky
> They rise, scarce touched by melancholy airs,
> Which stir the fadeless foliage dreamfully,
> As if from realms of mystical despairs.

Somehow, one prefers the lighter Nature poems of Hayne's lesser known and less prolific compatriot, James Matthew Legaré. He died at thirty-six and left but one book, "Orta-Undis," containing some exquisite writing doubtless inherited from the French. A didactic note, via New England, mars some of the poems: the ballad, "Ahab Mohammed," sounds like one of Longfellow's. "Haw-Blossoms," an appealing lyric, also forces a moral. Before the moral intrudes, it moves to such charming measures as—

> The calmias and golden-rods,
> And tender blossoms of the haw,
> Like maidens seated in the wood,
> Demure, I saw.

"To A Lily" has a similar French grace. Of these two poets, Hayne gave the larger performance and Legaré the better promise.

Other poets of the period are Alexander Beaufort Meek, Philip Pendleton Cooke, Henry Rootes Jackson, Theodore O'Hara, James Barron Hope, Albert Pike, and among the other poets of Secession, Margaret Junkin Preston and Francis O. Ticknor. Most are remembered for single poems. Meek, a South Carolinian, wrote the familiar "Balaklava"; it might survive but for Tennyson's "Charge Of The Light Brigade." Cooke, a Virginian gentleman and lover of the chase, wrote a book of "Froissart Ballads" and romances in prose. Poe and Lowell admired him, but only his poem, "Florence Vane," keeps his name in print. Brigadier-General Jackson, another gifted amateur, published a volume, "Tallulah," redolent of his native Georgia, and it contains at least the pregnant line: "The red old hills of Georgia!" So far as we know, the Kentuckian O'Hare wrote but two real poems, but both are excellent. In the genre of the dirge, "The Bivouac Of The Dead" is one of the finest American poems. "The Old Pioneer" is a picturesque study of the re-interment of Daniel Boone and his wife. Hope, like his Northern contemporary, Holmes, was a poet of occasions, and recited so many memorial poems that he earned the sobriquet, "the Virginian laureate." Albert Pike was a more competent poet than any of the above. Born, like Poe, in Bos-

ton in 1809, he belongs not so much to the South as to the Southwest. He was one of the early Arkansas pioneers. A decided man of action, he served in the Mexican and Civil Wars, and during the latter rose to the command of Indians on the Confederate side. General Pike's "Hymn To The Gods" made a profound impression at the time. His popular poem, "Dixie," shows how completely he espoused the cause of his adoption, and his ode to the mocking bird, reminiscent of Keats and Shelley, is a moving tribute to the singer of the South. "The Widowed Heart," appearing two years before "The Raven," is of interest for the plagiarism attributed to Poe by friends of the General. Similarities are apparent, but whatever the facts or fancies of thievery, "The Raven" is clearly the better poem.

> Thou art lost to me forever!—I have lost thee, Isadore!
> Thy head will never rest upon my loyal bosom more;
> Thy tender eyes will nevermore look fondly into mine,
> Nor thine arms around me lovingly and trustingly entwine,—
> Thou art lost to me forever, Isadore!

Most of the other war poets of the South, like those of the North, are too numerous for mention, and their poems have merely an historic interest. Many were the Southern heroes commemorated, from private to general, and idolatrous tributes were paid to Lee and Jackson. The most indefatigable poet and the first woman in the field, was Margaret Junkin. Like Albert Pike, she was born in the North (Philadelphia), but after she married a schoolmate of Poe's, Professor Preston of the Virginia Military Institute, her heart went South for good: she became the representative woman singer of the Confederacy. She published several volumes of verse, including a book of "Colonial Ballads." A number of poems to Stonewall Jackson were occasioned by his dying words: "Let us cross the river and rest in the shade." In the charge in which the Union army was driven across the Rappahannock at Chancellorsville, the Confederates lost 17,000 men, and, greatest blow of the war, Jackson and members of his staff were accidentally shot down by men in gray. Mrs. Preston used Stonewall's final speech as the refrain of her poem, "Under The Shade Of The Trees." Lanier and

others were also inspired by the beautiful line. One of the last orders of Lee, "Let the tent be struck," started Mrs. Preston's poem, "Gone Forward," and her "Acceptation" bears the quiet resignation of the Commander's surrender.

Dr. Ticknor, the Georgian, is usually ranked with Poe, Timrod, Hayne and Lanier. But he was more of an occasional than a genuine poet. Out of all the poems written about privates and drummer boys—the most appealing records of any war—"Little Giffen Of Tennessee" is the most poignant. At the other extreme, the aristocratic spirit of Virginia is described in "the knightliest of the knightly race"

> That rode with Raleigh round the land,
> With Smith around the seas.

As a counterpart of Timrod's "Carolina," Ticknor wrote a "Virginia," using virtually the same metrical scheme. Both poems were surpassed by James Ryder Randall's fiery "My Maryland." This battle-hymn is remarkable for its portrait of a people northern geographically, but southern in spirit, and was occasioned by an attack on Massachusetts troops passing through Baltimore. Randall was only twenty-two at the time. He wrote another dynamic ballad, "John Pelham," in honor of a young officer whose daring at Fredericksburg earned the praise of Lee. Pelham was killed at twenty-two. His body lay in state at Richmond, and he was honored after death by being made a lieutenant-colonel. Final mention goes to the host of anonymous men who often compose the most thrilling relics of a war: men of the field as a rule. The best of these ballads, crude though such pieces usually are, is "The Brigade Must Not Know, Sir!" The sudden death of Stonewall is revealed in a dialogue, as the dead bodies are brought up in order:

> "Well, who comes next?" "Doctor, speak low, speak low, sir;
> Don't let the men find out!
> It's STONEWALL!" "God!" "The brigade must not know, sir,
> While there's a foe about!"

Sidney Lanier, like Poe, Pinkney and Timrod, suffered a dual battle with health and the economic ogre and died compara-

tively young. More than any other American poet, he was cut down before his theories had received the benefits of a thorough artistic test. Contrary to Whitman, who believed in the theory after the performance, the young Georgian first built up an elaborate system of versification based upon musical laws with which, by instinct and training, he was most conversant, and then wrote his poetry accordingly. In this the Southern rebel resembled some of the later pioneers in free verse. He enslaved himself to form quite as restrictive as the conservative's abject prostration before classic conventions. His esthetic forerunner was Poe, who reared an equally fascinating tower of poetics in which he dwelt proudly and loyally. But Poe, closer to the nature of poetry as an art in itself, was nearer perfection. He saw that the limitations of an art are among its strongest fortifications. Had Lanier lived long enough and freely enough, he would doubtless have perfected the instrument on which he played his original melodies: his poetry might now be recognized as pure poetry. For the most part, he achieved nothing more than a succession of beautiful tones and rhythms. What is wanting in Lanier, as in Poe and other artists in whom the critic surpassed the creator, is a little more of matter and less of manner, and a marriage so complete between subject and object as to make them indivisible. One has to make too many allowances for Lanier's intentions. They were superlative enough in themselves, but the performer falls too far behind his ideals. He is therefore too technical an artist ever to appeal to a large audience of divine average readers. He belongs to the studio, and to the musician's more than the poet's. The wide world can never take him completely to heart. He is not, except at persuasive moments, a companion, but a solitary. He speaks in a rather foreign tongue made up not so much of words as entrancing syllables. The soul of Lanier's musical scheme contained a didactic religionist. He was the most Christian and optimistic of poets, an optimism supremely brave in the worst of conditions. Like some of the Northern Puritans, he permitted a sustained flight of music aroused by Nature to be tainted

with dogma. The preaching is forced, as with Longfellow, not implicit, as with Bryant. And so Lanier remains one of the tragic mysteries of American poetry, another victim of the general national inexperience with life and with letters.

Like other American originals, he needed a line of path-breakers to lay down the groundwork before him. His own failure as a pioneer is even more apparent in his thin school of followers. As compared with Poe, Emerson or Whitman, he had little influence on the future. His "Science Of English Verse" is a monument of stylistic criticism and as invaluable to poets as the documented system of Poe. But when one opens Lanier's poetry, one has to leave behind a great deal compact of theory alone, or of incommunicable music. Frail and handicapped though he was, the Georgian was an ardent creature of flesh and blood. Nor did he lack confidence in his powers. In 1864, in the midst of the hardships of the war—he was an early volunteer—he wrote a letter about the gradual turn of his nature to poetry. He was then twenty-two. Nine years later, he wrote to his wife, that exquisite companion and nurse of his sufferings: "This . . . is clear to me as the sun, now that I *know,* through the fiercest tests of life, that I am in soul, and shall be in life and utterance, a great poet." The same letter shows a confidence in the presence of God in his effort, an echo of his Calvinistic upbringing. The sombre tone of his letters is in direct contrast with his customary buoyancy. His first poems were melancholy, and he refused to print them because he felt that melancholy was inconsistent with the highest aims of art. Here he once more differed with Poe to whom sadness was the only real cloak for beauty. Lanier's first collection did not appear until 1877—the only one during his lifetime. He died four years later of the pulmonary disease contracted during his five-month imprisonment at Point Lookout. The "Science Of English Verse" came out the year before.

As a child, Lanier learned a number of musical instruments. The famous silver flute he played in the Peabody Orchestra of Baltimore was the inseparable pal of his growing years. The

director of the orchestra has recorded: "His art was not only the art of art, but an art above art." It was natural that the flute, with its disembodied soul, should be his. His poetry has a similar characteristic. Even when they derive from Nature, as in "The Marshes Of Glynn," his lines leave the earth for the empyrean. There is passion in Lanier, but it is usually spiritual or intellectual, rather than bodily or emotional. If his writing is often vague, it is due to his final dependence on abstractions above realities. Nothing could be more melodious than "The Song Of The Chattahoochee." As in its kindred poem, Poe's "Ulalume," the appeal is to the ear, as the chant of a river should be. But to Poe's sheer esthetic, Lanier, in the closing stanza, adds the call of Duty, and turns the Chattahoochee into a Christian stream. An over-fondness for alliteration may be found in the second stanza. Alliteration, reticently employed, is an effective element in poetry, but it should never be the principal element. Still, this stanza has a winsome quality, and is typical of Lanier's best music:

> All down the hills of Habersham,
> All through the valleys of Hall,
> The rushes cried *Abide, abide,*
> The wilful waterweeds held me thrall,
> The laving laurel turned my tide,
> The ferns and the fondling grass said *Stay,*
> The dewberry dipped for to work delay,
> And the little reeds sighed *Abide, abide,*
> *Here in the hills of Habersham,*
> *Here in the valleys of Hall.*

A "Ballad Of Trees And The Master" is the most appealing of Lanier's Christian poems. The musical scheme is guided with more precision; the ballad comes through clearly. "Content with Death and Shame," the Master is crucified. The image of shame is Calvinistic. A similar faith in death appears in "The Stirrup-Cup." Death is a "cordial old and rare" made of "sweet herbs from all antiquity." Like many confirmed invalids, Lanier must have gathered strength for the last encounter through oft-repeated visits from the fancied ghost. He was on better terms with the hereafter than the present. In this he resembled Bryant

and other mystics. Frequently, the jauntiest human being is the one with the severest earthly handicaps. Chronic cheerfulness emanates from the poor and the diseased. Possibly, if you tempt man with sufficient hope, hope will become his sole actuality and the only thing to which he can respond. Whether its name be Christianity, Nirvana, the hereafter or merely to-morrow, the man wears a constant dawn in his eyes. This dawn hovers over Lanier.

Among the human angels who hovered over him, none was more potent than Mary Day, his wife. He met her during a two-week furlough from the battle front, but four years passed before they were married. After three years of service, he had been captured and imprisoned. According to his biographer, Edwin Mims, "he came out emaciated to a skeleton, down-hearted for want of news from home, down-hearted for weariness." The tale of his return to consciousness, of the tenderness of his fellow soldiers, of his call for the flute, of the "yell of joy" when his comrades heard he was still alive, is made of tragedy. Not long after his release, the cause for which the men had all fought was over. The itinerant musician walked the whole distance from Richmond to his home in Macon. Here, his momentary recovery was accompanied by the death of his mother; and here he turned to clerking and teaching by way of supporting Mary Day, now his wife. His real calling was at last made apparent and, in his earliest poems, he voiced his love for his companion. In his longest work, "The Jacquerie," there is a delicate lyric which plays upon her name. It has a rapt, disembodied air reminiscent of Poe, but the music is Lanier's. The first verse deals with "May the maiden," the second with "Day the stately," the last with

> Night the holy
> Sailing slowly
> Over the violet sea,
> Stars uncovers
> Over lovers,
> Stars for thee, Marie, and me,
> Stars for me and thee.

Not until Lanier was thirty-one did he find some fairly congenial employment. To his post in the Peabody Symphony were added his lectures on English literature at the Institute and at Johns Hopkins. These last two posts came to him two or three years before his death. Happily, the publication in *Lippincott's* of his "Ode To Corn" evoked the worldly recognition he needed. The poet was roused by the sight of deserted Southern farms ravaged by the war. Amid the desolation, he envisioned a restoration of fertility through the hands of a new industry. In this, a union of man with his Maker and a plowing of Nature "with antique sinew and with modern art" outlined a program now carried out by progressive Southern states. Much of the poem is turgid, but the movement of the following stanza is dignified and orotund:

> To-day the woods are trembling through and through
> With shimmering forms, that flash before my view,
> Then melt in green as dawn-stars melt in blue.
> The leaves that wave against my cheek caress
> Like women's hands; the embracing boughs express
> A subtlety of mighty tenderness;
> The copse-depths into little noises start,
> That sound anon like beatings of a heart,
> Anon like talk 'twixt lips not far apart.

This is interpreting Nature through images of human love, but the poet was justified in feeling husbandry at work between man and his great green mistress. To his faith in the healing genius of agriculture, Lanier added a later plea for the brotherhood of labor, as against the stifling restrictions and the new slavery of factories and of trade. Unhappily, he decided on a symphonic poem as the burden of his text: "I call it The Symphony: I personify each instrument in the orchestra, and make them discuss various deep social questions of the times, in the program of the music."

The same criticism which often applies to the authors of program music applies to this poetic scheme: there is an attempt to join two arts, in themselves original and complete.

"O Trade! O Trade! would thou wert dead!
The Time needs heart—'tis tired of head:
We're all for love," the violin said.

This is true, and true that violins are the best love-makers. But the plain statement that the violin spoke removes the poem from the realm of imaginative realism into factitious fancy. There are many delicious passages—

And then the hautboy played and smiled,
And sang like any large-eyed child,
Cool-hearted and all undefiled.

When the child employs speech and sings "Huge Trade!" and so on, the illusion is destroyed. One of the most penetrating bits is the line: "Music is Love in search of a word." It is too bad the word is expressed, for music is best in its absolute independence and purity. And poetry too.

Bayard Taylor's enthusiasm for "The Symphony" led to Lanier's selection as the poet to compose the centennial ode for the World's Fair at Philadelphia. This move showed how closely North and South were once more allied in the new Union. The poem, which does not stand alone, was written as a cantata, with music to be added by the hymn-like Dudley Buck. Lanier even underscored certain passages—"Full chorus, sober, measured and yet majestic progression of chords." The entrance of the Mayflower is announced—"Chorus: the sea and the winds weighing their voices with human sighs." There is a chorus of jubilation in praise of God, and a "basso solo" for the Good Angel:

"Long as thine Art shall love true love,
Long as thy Science truth shall know,
Long as thine Eagle harms no Dove,
Long as thy Law by law shall grow,
Long as thy God is God above,
Thy brother every man below,
So long, dear Land of all my love,
Thy name shall shine, thy fame shall glow!"

Thanks to the larger reception accorded him, Lanier was able to pursue his vocation with greater conviction and to see himself

more and more the poet per se. Little though the remaining time and strength, he composed the poem generally considered his masterpiece: "The Marshes Of Glynn." He planned to write six movements around the marshes of his childhood, but only finished four. This poem displays a growing maturity and promise of further maturity. In its breadth and depth, there are tones and rhythms indicative of an approximate mastery over the difficult theories he had set himself. Again we find an interesting contrast with Poe. Immersed though Poe was in the landscape of the South, and melancholy and mellifluous though his art, he did not achieve as deeply contactual an experience with the soil. "The Marshes Of Glynn" presents a vivid background of the Georgian country: sensual images combine in a pattern as intimate and intricate as the grove of live-oaks, "beautifully braided and woven," through which the symphony moves. The movement undulates to a *tempo rubato* in which long lines, medium and short are handled in a rhythmic scheme akin to the measures of music, rather than the metrics of verse. Each line, long or short, has an equal time-value, and it is fascinating to trace the relationship between the measures of the poem and the same poem written out as a musical score. In such an arrangement, the short lines would have the qualities of slow whole-notes and half-notes, while the long lines would turn into swifter quarters, eighths, sixteenths and so on. Such an analogy, not arbitrarily superimposed, shows how far Lanier had advanced in progressive versification. After the opening lines, mood and movement gather momentum. In the third stanza, still in a continuous sentence, the coming of twilight announces:

And my heart is at ease from men, and the wearisome sound of the stroke
Of the scythe of time and the trowel of trade is low,
And belief overmasters doubt, and I know that I know,
And my spirit is grown to a lordly great compass within,
That the length and the breadth and the sweep of the marshes of Glynn
Will work me no fear like the fear they have wrought me of yore,
When length was fatigue, and when breadth was but bitterness sore . . .

Suddenly, with the next stanza, the involved sentence reaches a cadence in a slower movement announcing the clear motive:

> Oh, now, unafraid, I am fain to face
> The vast sweet visage of space.

One is reminded of the druidical Bryant in the depth of his primeval America. In the Puritan, the verse is classical and serene; in the Southerner, richly varied and romantic. Lanier reaches the edge of the wood and issues forth, "free by a world of marsh that borders a world of sea." The movement rises to still another mood and metre:

Sinuous southward and sinuous northward the shimmering band
Of the sand-beach fastens the fringe of the marsh to the folds of the land.
Inward and outward and northward and southward the beach-lines linger and curl
As a silver-wrought garment that clings to and follows the firm sweet limbs of a girl.

The feminine simile is part of the cosmic pattern. It brings back the theme of two lovers from the opening stanza. The light now appears in full, and the marsh-grasses, "green, and all of a height,"

> Stretch leisurely off, in a pleasant plain,
> To the terminal blue of the main.

In the presence of the sea comes the communion of the spirit with the Creator. The emphasis on the Deity sounds like the entrance of a jubilant trombone resolving the shadowy confusion of the orchestral development:

As the marsh-hen secretly builds on the watery sod,
Behold I will build me a nest on the greatness of God:
I will fly in the greatness of God as the marsh-hen flies
In the freedom that fills all the space 'twixt the marsh and the skies . . .

Now the sea-tide rises and floods "the uttermost creeks," and "in the rose and silver evening glow," we hear the line, "Farewell, my lord Sun!" How superb that line, and how reminiscent of

the sun-worship to which Lanier, like many another invalid, was addicted. A muted quietude follows; the poem draws to a close in the stillness of water at night, when "the tide is in his ecstasy." To the question, what lies on the edge of sleep, the poet concludes:

And I would I could know what swimmeth below when the tide comes in
On the length and breadth of the marvellous marshes of Glynn.

"Sunrise," Lanier's hymn to the sun over the marshes, is a still more ambitious experiment in musical poetry, and though more involved and less successful than the more famous poem, is instinct with beautiful and original passages. At the outset, live-oaks are recalled, and "the little green leaves would not let me alone in my sleep." In a complicated section, these trees are addressed as his beloved and are invoked for the healing message they hold for an ailing heart. A passionate invocation to the leaves ends in a request that they lift their myriad palms and pray a myriad prayer for him. The leaves are addressed with a lightness akin to their dancing character:

> Ye lispers, whisperers, singers in storms,
> Ye consciences murmuring faiths under forms,
> Ye ministers meet for each passion that grieves,
> Friendly, sisterly, sweetheart leaves . . .

With the greeting, "Good morrow, Lord Sun!" the irregular pageant and hymn come to an optimistic climax in the midst of the tragic necessity described in the ensuing lines:

Yet ever the artist, ever more large and bright
Than the eye of a man may avail of:—manifold One,
I must pass from the face, I must pass from the face of the Sun:
Old Want is awake and agog, every wrinkle a-frown;
The worker must pass to his work in the terrible town:
But I fear not, nay, and I fear not the thing to be done;
I am strong with the strength of my lord the Sun . . .

Lanier, in "Sunrise," described the plight of artists in the face of insuperable odds. The same brave note comes up in later America, notably in Robert Frost's poem, "Our Singing

Strength." Lanier was a pioneer who has not yet come into his own, notwithstanding the contribution he made to the advance of autochthonous poetry. Though his work was incomplete and uneven, it belongs to a major tendency. At the core of the deepest tragedy, the man was still "lit with the sun," the sun the Greeks worshiped as the godhead of poetry.

XIII

MID-WESTERN AND FAR-WESTERN FRONTIERS

Some city's apparition, weird and grand,
In dazzling quiet fronts the lonely land.
John James Piatt.

WITH the decline of New England after the Civil War, a decline which had earned compensations in the stronger Union and the further expansion of the nation, a younger race and further American culture developed. The West and Far-West, settled some years before the War, owed most of their growth to pioneer New England extending beyond its own borders. The restless members of Puritan stock had turned on the conservative and, pursuing the lure of progress, left their homes and dug their way into a wilderness as barren of white humanity as the once far-spread shores of the Atlantic. Men of the Middle and Southern states joined this march and added their own racial ideals. Even a cursory survey of the new areas shows how truly the Puritan was first in the field and how deeply he affected succeeding generations. Though most of the settlers were composed of Eastern riff-raff and adventurers who were useless at home and quite as useless abroad, the real labor came out of the same hardy human type which had arrived at Plymouth in primitive times. Opening the literary records, we find most critics are impatient with the slow march of Western culture. It is unfair to call that progress slow which has had less than a century of American life. The literary pioneers of the Middle-West were born not long ago; to these just a few names can be added in judging the states farther West. Despite extremities of national and cultural inexperience, the Middle-West has grown more rapidly than any other locale in American history. Out of the pioneers came that remarkably rapid and

varied movement which led, just before the late World War, to the national renascence in poetry and prose to which the Middle-West contributed most of the leading figures. The Far-West has lagged behind, but among the early pioneers are Joaquin Miller, John Hay, Bret Harte and Edward Rowland Sill, and among the later, George Sterling and Robinson Jeffers. Any one who has attempted to explore, merely as a Pullman traveler, the Mississippi Valley, the Rockies, the Pacific coast, must marvel that such vast regions could have been bent to civilization so swiftly, and marvel even more that anything in the shape of the creative arts has had time to take root and flourish.

In Fenimore Cooper's day, the fringes of the wilderness skirted the Central New York to which his father moved the Coopers in 1790. The novelist's boyhood imagination responded to the wilderness, and the pioneer Leather-Stocking emerged. As early as Philip Freneau, Atlantic poets wondered about the mythical West, and in 1784, the New York poet's "On The Emigration To America And Peopling The Western Country" envisioned the progress ahead. It was about this time Virginia ceded to the nation her territorial claims west of the Alleghanies, and the march of emigration ensued. To the Mississippi, "great Sire of floods," Freneau addressed a pæan in which the hand of mankind bends the river's "ten thousand streams" to the freights of commerce. Freed of "Europe's proud, despotic shores," the Eastern states are still "half to slaves consigned, where kings and priests enchain the mind." The muse calls upon future Western states,

> Whose deeds may over death prevail,
> And happier systems bring to view
> Than all the eastern sages knew.

In reverting to Freneau and letting the imagination soar across the perspective of American poetry from his day to ours, it is interesting to note that the pioneer is more vital than the esthete in shaping the future of the art. Assuredly, the visionary and the rational are necessary to all complete artists. When there is a division between the two qualities, or the presence of one with-

out the other, the imagination has a more lasting influence than the intellect. If America is still indebted to Europe for the norm of civilization, it is in variations from the norm that the American adventure has manifested its originality. Progress has been made through fresh combinations of the old and through further discoveries. It is curious how Freneau, while aping the Popian couplet, was sufficiently moved by the Revolution to write the first of Western poems, such as it is. Our first real poet, Bryant, touched by similar visions, wrote a more concrete impression of the Westward trend. In his poem on the prairies, he embraced the earliest poets of the Middle and Far-West. Among the other large Easterners, Emerson and Whitman did the same. Walt gave his roaming, boundless heart to the whole continent.

For a complete source of the poetry of Western frontiers, one consults the legends and ballads recording a racy reaction to the soil. Those concerning Daniel Boone and Davy Crockett, the cowboy songs collected by Lomax, the railroad songs following the opening of the first transcontinental roads, the Mississippi steamboat songs—these and similar collections, crude though they are, form an unbowdlerized basis superior to the work of the cultivated poets. Most of the poets owed their origin or influence to Eastern models: the few outstanding names are hardly more than promising. "Huckleberry Finn," saga of the Mississippi, and the writings and speeches of Lincoln, contain more poetry than the poetry of such Middle-Westerners as William Davis Gallagher, the Cary sisters, the Piatts, Howells, William Henry Venable, Will Carleton and Francis Fisher Brown—who founded the present-day *Dial* in 1880. The first books of Field and Riley appeared at a later period. In the Far-West, the earliest names are those of Hay, Harte, Miller, Sill and Ambrose Bierce.

Gallagher, born in Philadelphia in 1808, emigrated westward in his boyhood and became associated with *The Louisville Courier*, *The Cincinnati Gazette* and various literary ventures. He is mostly identified with the growing metropolis among the seven lordly hills of the winding Ohio River. Cincinnati was

then the cultural leader of the young frontiers. Gallagher's first poems, "Erato," appeared before he was thirty, and his last, "Miami Woods," in 1881. Shortly after "Erato," he published the pioneer anthology, "Selections From The Poetical Literature Of The West." He was a better critic than poet. His poems are usually didactic and have mostly an historic value. The "Mothers Of The West" is a tribute to the part frontier women played in fighting off the Delaware and Shawnee Indians. "Autumn In The West," reminiscent of Bryant's blank verse, also echoes the druid in casting off the town for the primeval forest. The famous Cary sisters were born in the Miami Valley: Alice in 1820, Phœbe in 1824. Their first poems appeared together in 1850. Two years later, the poets emigrated, not westward, but eastward to New York, where they spent their remaining lives in a round of polite parties among the literati. The sisters died in the same year, 1871. The Carys are hardly representative of the Middle-West, except insofar as that region, in its household pursuits, knelt to the sentimental aspects of Puritan poetry. The girls were therefore popular during their fairly long day. Alice was the more prolific and slightly better poet, but it is to Phœbe we owe:

> One sweetly solemn thought
> Comes o'er me more and more;
> I am nearer home to-day
> Than I ever have been before.

This lyric, with its easily expressed trust in the hereafter, is an harbinger of many such feminine poems to come. Phœbe also indulged in parodies and conventional war poems. Alice was a kind of female Longfellow. Such poems as "Light And Love" and "What Is Life," with their facile antitheses, were certain to endear her to fireside readers. "Harvest Time" is a mellifluous rendition of early farm life, and gently introduces the corn-fed school of later literature.

With the Piatts, John James and his wife, Sarah Morgan Bryan, known like the Brownings as "the wedded poets," we come a little closer to Mid-Western soil. Piatt was born in

Indiana, his wife in Kentucky. In 1860, Piatt and the Ohioan Howells collaborated in the "Poems Of Two Friends." Piatt was then twenty-five, Howells twenty-three. The next collaboration was one between the Piatts: "The Nests At Washington." They were very prolific: every few years one or the other issued a book of poems or prose or an anthology. Though the Piatts were better poets than Gallagher and the Carys, even the poems with a local flavor owe more to the New England and English past. Most of the thinking and the form of the thought is conventionally Puritan. Piatt's "Suggested Device Of A New Western State" limns a log-cabin where

> A woman by its door, with steadfast sight,
> Trustful, looks Westward, where, uplifted bright,
> Some city's apparition, weird and grand
> In dazzling quiet fronts the lonely land . . .

Mrs. Piatt devoted much of her time to juvenile poetry and to fables and ballads prettily turned. "Envoy" discloses the ideals of her art and the position it attained:

> But let me, singing, sit apart,
> In tender quiet with a few,
> And keep my fame upon my heart,
> A little blush-rose wet with dew.

Howells was scarcely a better poet than his friend, Piatt, but he led the Mid-Western vanguard in its march on the East. His metier lay in the field of naturalistic fiction, mellow books of essays and his humanitarian skill in editing *The Atlantic, Harper's* and *The Cosmopolitan*. At least one poem, the sonnet, "Vision," is noteworthy. It is the type of economic study characteristic of a later era. The vivid presentation, in the octave, of a poor man, his "workworn wife," the sty they slept in, and "the foulness and forlornness everywhere," turns to the sestet in a banquet room, "the guests descending in a brilliant line," "the poor man's landlord leading down to dine." This sonnet is neither Italian nor Shakespearean, but American.

Venable, another Ohioan, was another cultural pioneer who wrote poetry. Of the verse descriptive of the early days of the

Ohio Company, the ballad of John Filson tells how that schoolmaster laid out Losantiville—now Cincinnati. Another ballad relates the legend of the eccentric Johnny Appleseed who went through the wilderness planting seeds which grew into apple-orchards. The Indians, thinking him mad, did not molest him. The poem is doggerel compared to the chanting ballad of a later Mid-Westerner, Vachel Lindsay. Venable is also remembered for excursions into *vers-de-société:* his capricious lines on a catbird sketch in a method extended by Amy Lowell and her followers:

. . Prime cantante!
Scherzo! Andante!
Piano, pianissimo!
Presto, prestissimo!

Will Carleton, of Michigan, remains in the sentimental memory for his sentimental "Farm Ballads," "Farm Legends," "Farm Festivals," and the later "City Ballads," "City Legends," "City Festivals."

Though the Middle-West eventually became the leader of the national renascence, these early poets were not the real pioneers. And they were considerably outdistanced by poets who were born or emigrated farther West. John Hay's "Pike County Ballads," like Bret Harte's, are identified with the Middle-West, but the Indiana poet won greater distinction for his services to the country than his service to poetry. At twenty-three, he was Lincoln's assistant private secretary and served later as his adjutant and aide-de-camp. Hay sailed abroad in various diplomatic capacities and served Hayes as Assistant Secretary and McKinley as Secretary of State. He rounded out a brilliant public career with his life on Lincoln, in conjunction with J. G. Nicolay. In his boyhood, Hay dreamed of becoming a poet—of the conservative school. His classical verse was buried by the half dozen "Pike County Ballads" he contributed to *The New York Tribune.* These ballads were inspired by the popularity of Bret Harte's California stories and owe their own popularity to a clever welding of character, dialect, sentiment and humor. They lie in the tradition of dialect writing begun by James Rus-

sell Lowell. "Jim Bludso," the best of the ballads, is a study of the traditional Mississippi pilot made famous by Twain. Jim is a combination of the hard-boiled exterior and soft interior adored by the American mass, from our early balladry to our latest movie. Jim is no saint. He has one wife in Natchez, another in Pike, and his engine is his sole religion. One day, in a race with the Movastar, his boat, the Prairie Belle, takes fire; but thanks to Jim, who holds "her nozzle gin the bank till the last galoot's ashore," all lives are saved but his own. The moral is typical:

> He warn't no saint,—but at jedgement
> I'd run my chance with Jim,
> 'Longside of some pious gentlemen
> That wouldn't shook hands with him.
> He seen his duty, a dead-sure thing,—
> And went for it thar and then;
> And Christ ain't a-goin' to be too hard
> On a man that died for men.

Bret Harte, born the year after Hay, at Albany, and closely identified with the Far-West, was a much more distinguished writer, since the whole, not some momentary phase of his life, was devoted to letters. Though it is now apparent that his famous stories and poems on California had a sentimental and humorous basis, bordering on melodrama, Harte added a new note to American literature, a note acclaimed by the British as well as the native audience. It has often been shown that Harte erred in returning to the East in response to his popularity, producing periodical dilutions of life on the Pacific coast. Even more curious, and pregnant with some mysterious personal tragedy, was his sudden flight abroad, before his fortieth year, and his long residence in England up to the time of his death. He broke off practically all of his early relations with the land of his birth. His first and funniest poem, "Plain Talk From Truthful James," appeared in *The Overland Monthly,* of which he was the original editor. Used as a last-moment filler, the poem struck the immediate fancy of the nation. It records, with the drollest solemnity, a euchre game in which Bill Nye,

Harte and one Ah Sin indulged, and shows how the innocent Chinaman, in the game "he did not understand," outwitted, outcheated and defeated his white opponents. The poem is the classical model for subsequent American foolery, and owes its haunting charm to the absurd inversions of the style:

> Which I wish to remark,
> And my language is plain,
> That for ways that are dark
> And for tricks that are vain,
> The heathen Chinee is peculiar,
> Which the same I would rise to explain.

The racial love for exaggeration, for under and over statement, is allowed full vent. The other ballads concerning Truthful James have a further appeal, particularly "The Society Upon The Stanislaus." In the sentimental vein, the staccato ballad, "Jim," is an antithesis to the slapstick ballads. In the serious vein, a vein Harte should have entered more often, "Grizzly" is a fine portrait of the outlaw nature of the bear. The opening lines are direct and accurate:

> Coward,—of heroic size,
> In whose lazy muscles lies
> Strength we fear and yet despise;
> Savage,—whose relentless tusks
> Are content with acorn husks;
> Robber,—whose exploits ne'er soared
> O'er the bee's or squirrel's hoard;
> Whiskered chin, and feeble nose,
> Claws of steel on baby toes,—. .
> Here, in solitude and shade,
> Shambling, shuffling plantigrade,
> Be thy courses undismayed!

If Harte too often failed to come to grips with his background, the failure of the extraordinary eccentric, Joaquin Miller, lay in the direction of the grandiose. Of Harte, one might have asked for more passion; of Miller, more restraint. And yet, whenever this long-haired, raw-hided, velvet-collared son of Indiana held himself in check, he produced the first genuine poems along the Pacific coast. Amid the utmost garrulity,

flights of bombast and painful versification, an occasional poem or verse of swinging power emerges. Intent from the outset on investing himself in mystery, Miller acted the poet frequently, and his Western isolation, fed by lack of recognition, stimulated the rôle. The date of his birth, the sources of his patronymic, his claim—"my cradle was a covered wagon, pointed west—" such items are shrouded between fiction and fact. Early in life, he fled Oregon in search of gold, and at fifteen, played at being an Indian among actual Indians. During the Civil War, he edited a pacifist paper which had to be suppressed. The name, Joaquin, was acquired from the Mexican bandit, Murietta, whom Miller defended in an article. The poet's first books appeared in 1868 and '69, and though the second was dedicated to "the bards of San Francisco Bay," it was received in comparative silence. Heartily disgusted, Miller sailed for England and there, after peddling manuscripts from publisher to publisher, issued a privately printed edition of his "Pacific Poems." The poet's sensational picturesqueness, added to the exotic effect of his verse on the Victorian mind, brought him an amazing welcome. So clearly did he approximate the Wild West, Europeans had read about in Cooper and his progeny, that Miller was hailed as the perfect representative of America. He was an even greater sensation socially: the dinner tendered by the Pre-Raphaelites must have been an Olympian affair. Puffed up by this acclaim from headquarters, Miller wandered over the continent and the Holy Land, and did not return to America for a number of years. After marrying again, this the third time, he settled down in California, and among the last quixotic acts of his life was an attempt to set up a Greek Academy for aspiring authors. He died on the eve of the American renascence in poetry—1913.

Miller published about twelve volumes of verse, and two novels, one of which was called "The Baroness Of New York." Though it is easy to laugh at our most incongruous author, one has to pause and consider that America, more than any other country, is peopled with queer fellows like Miller. Partly because of her isolation, her inexperience and the slow contact be-

tween areas separated by hundreds of miles, America, groping and spreading across the continent, was certain to give birth to numerous eccentrics. When the careful academe grows too prevalent, eccentricity is a benison, especially when it achieves a bit of originality. At his best, Miller was original, and a patient mining of his prolix, tumbling collection will bring the ore to light. One of his besetting sins was an enthusiasm for the exclamatory. Here are some lines from "Alaska":

> Ice built, ice bound, and ice bounded,
> Such cold seas of silence! such room!
> Such snow-light, such sea-light, confounded
> With thunders that smite like a doom!
> Such grandeur! such glory! such gloom!

This has power and spaciousness, but too much noise. "By The Pacific Ocean" has the same large vista, but the sound is attuned to poetry:

> Here room and kingly silence keep
> Companionship in state austere;
> The dignity of death is here,
> The large, lone vastness of the deep . . .

Though "ten thousand foresters" are gathered round the feet of a "lone imperial peak," the air is still and

> The dead red men refuse to rest;
> Their ghosts illume my lurid West.

A similar majesty of movement describes "the great yoked brutes" dragging "the creaking load" across the Plains. The rolling covered wagon is felt behind the plodding beasts:

> Two sullen bullocks led the line,
> Their great eyes shining bright like wine;
> Two sullen captive kings were they,
> That had in time held herds at bay,
> And even now they crushed the sod . .
> As if 'twere something still to be
> Kings even in captivity.

Of the many poems lauding the pioneer, "Westward Ho," with its "mighty nation moving west," is panoramic, and shows how

the heirs, whose "plowshares cleave softly through the mellow loam," are unaware of the tombs of forefathers whose "epitaphs are writ in furrows." In "Vaquero," Miller, an equally rude and untutored ruler, might have been describing himself:

> His broad-brimmed hat pushed back with careless air,
> The proud vaquero sits his steed as free
> As winds that toss his black abundant hair.
> No rover ever swept a lawless sea
> With such a haught and heedless air as he
> Who scorns the path, and bounds with swift disdain
> Away, a peon born, yet born to be
> A splendid king; behold him ride and reign.

Miller wrote many long and short poems about foreign lands. Most are comparatively unimportant now. His love of liberty everywhere, abroad as well as at home, came down from such early poets as Freneau and Halleck. Freneau was inspired by the French Revolution and Halleck by the Grecian struggle against the Turks. Miller wrote three stanzas to Russia permeated with a similar utterance. For once his exclamatory method was appropriate:

> Who gave the patient Christ? I say,
> Who gave your Christian creed? Yea, yea,
> Who gave your very God to you?
> Your Jew! Your Jew! Your hated Jew!

From the ardent, space-adoring, bombastic and at times poetic Miller, one turns to another puzzling figure: Ambrose Bierce, an eccentric hermit with a difference. Like Harte, he is better known for his stories—stories that match Poe in their highly stylized devotion to the grotesque and horrible. Bierce left behind a volume of poems, "Black Beetles In Amber," which deserves more notice than it has received of posterity. Born in Ohio, and a private and officer during the Civil War, he spent the greater part of his life in California. To this day, the date and place of his death have not been ascertained. He was bitterly at odds with the world and expressed his misanthropy through sardonic tales and poems. "The Black Beetles" abound in mystery, terror and satire, and they have the additional qual-

ity of unfolding a ballad through the cumulative effect of caustic details. Bierce, who was over-fond of dream images, is particularly pungent in the ballad, "Montefiore." This centenarian, far-famed for his unceasing generosity, is surrounded by "Jews and Gentiles in a hundred tongues" extolling his deeds. The final line drives home the barbed irony:

> So closely round him swarmed our shouting clan
> He scarce could breathe, and, taking from a pan
> A gleaming coin, he tossed it o'er our heads,
> And in a moment was a lonely man!

In "Another Way," the poet lies dead in fancy and a woman places a rose on his breast. He loved her too lightly, and lightly the last verse runs:

> To-day the words are mine. I lay the rose
> Upon her breast, and speak her name, and deem
> It strange indeed that she is dead. God knows
> I had more pleasure in the other dream.

To what length Bierce might have gone as a poet may be judged from the strange power of the lines to T. A. H. Though somewhat rhetorical and artificial, the poem has a compelling swing. The comparison of the "rough inflections" of the otherwise perfect earth with the "small asperities of spirit" in his friend's "grander curves of character," is a vivid simile. Struck down by a sudden blow,

> He uttered not a cry,
> But set his teeth and made a revelry;
> Drank like a devil,—straining sometimes red
> The goblet's edge; diced with his conscience; spread,
> Like Sisyphus, a feast for Death, and spoke
> His welcome in a tongue so long forgot
> That even his ancient guest remembered not
> What race had cursed him in it. . . .
> And, having meanly lived, is grandly dead.

Of all the mid-century hermits who sought a California haven, the New Englander, Edward Rowland Sill, was most significant. His full importance was overlooked during his lifetime and now he is mainly remembered by anthologists who, true to the tribe,

copy one another by reprinting the same poems. Any one engaged in a survey of American poetry is liable to overlook this or that poet: the present student is no exception to the tendency. But, in going over the posthumous collection of Sill's poems, so many of which he issued anonymously, one is swayed by an unusual personality: a man who could ally himself neither with the radical nor the orthodox movements of his time, and who, in his isolated sphere, vacillated between his Eastern home and the West of his adoption. For all his isolation, he was an offshoot of Transcendentalism, and, had his health permitted a longer life, would have come down to us a larger poet. Submerged by the fame of lesser poets like Lowell and Holmes, Sill fell between the New England decline and the national renascence, of which he was an obscure forerunner. Possibly his refusal to accept the glib generalities of the more happily endowed Concordians, held him aloof from popularity. Next to the jocund Longfellow, he looms a courageous, truth-seeing individual; and he was Poe's equal in the esthetic realm. And since his esthetic power bent his melancholia to an objective resolution, his poems have a more decided reality than Poe's. Sill is a concentrated poet, simple and subtle, clear and musical. There is never any noise or sensationalism—another unpopular sign. To appreciate the control he had over his instrument, one must approach him as artist to artist. Within the limits he set himself, he was the purest artist in Nineteenth Century American poetry. Indeed, his spirit laps over the present century, where the concern with poetry, as an art in itself, finally comes through on a broader basis. Though he died over forty years ago, Sill is the closest antecedent of Robinson; and like Robinson's, his life was monkishly devoted to poetry. So far as we know, its events were devoid of glamor. They have no attraction for biographers who delve into the more dramatic Poe or Whitman. This may be another reason for the neglect shrouding Sill's poetry.

He was born at Windsor, Conn., in 1841, and died at Cleveland, Ohio, in 1887. Like Jones Very, maddest of Transcendentalists, he studied for the ministry but never preached in the

pulpit. Fairly early, afflicted with ill health and out of sorts with New England, he migrated to Ohio, and then to California, earning his way as a teacher. He graced the chair of English literature at the University of California for about eight years—a stimulating experience for his pupils—and then returned East, hoping at last to devote himself entirely to writing. About five years remained. During his lifetime, he published one volume, "The Hermitage," and a privately printed sheaf, "The Venus Of Milo." Severely conscientious in the pursuit of an ideal, he never rushed into print and often attached pseudonyms to periodical poems. In the last year or two of his life, the Houghton Mifflin Company offered to issue a volume, but Sill preferred to wait still longer. The publishers had to wait until after his death, and issued three successive volumes, and finally the collected poems, his prose work and letters.

Individualism carried itself to an almost complete loneliness in Sill. The general tone of his work is clearly a New England compact of the twilight of Transcendentalism and the dawn of that tougher scientific inquiry we term psychology. He labored in the transition out of which Robinson, Frost and present-day Yankee poets arose. Sill's poetry is a balance between optimism and skepticism, hope and despair, romance and reality. His is therefore an instrument made of antitheses, neither too subtle nor too obvious. He avoided the starry intoxication of Emerson and the trite moralities of Longfellow. But he had Emerson's courage in eyeing things in the round, and carried beyond Longfellow the cultural aspects of poetry. Sill had refined sensory organs allied to a spiritual view; his poems are a musical amalgam of sense and spirit. Within his limitations, his ear matched his eye, his mind his emotions. He wrote a larger number of perfectly sustained lyrics than any of his contemporaries. Their content falls short of Emerson, for Emerson was the larger man. Sill was an esthete who lived to the full, and a man who bravely transmuted his life into beauty. In short, he was a perfect minor poet in the finest connotation of a phrase too often maligned. It is difficult to choose among the poems. But they may be classified under Nature, loneliness, the Tran-

scendental god, the antipathetic world, and love. The love poems alone, written at a time when the theme had scarcely been touched by Puritans, are memorable. They are mostly in the minor key of the lost love so attractive to Poe. But Poe resigned himself to supernal, inchoate Lenores and Ulalumes. Sill's lost love is more actual; he is more closely related to the master of German love poetry—minus Heine's bitterness and irony. Sill writes in a dusky trance and employs muted strings for his music. Most of his love poems were issued in the "Hermione" volume. The title poem is a lyric sequence of which the opening stanzas rehearse the tale of Galatea. The final quatrain strikes the keynote of the volume:

> Dear artist of the storied land!
> I too have loved a heart of stone.
> What was thy charm of voice or hand,
> Thy secret spell, Pygmalion?

Sill's cadences carry a story through from the first to the last beat, thus fulfilling Poe's demand that a poem be considered as a whole, not stanza by stanza. Sill also anticipates Robinson in his fondness for a final clinching epigram. The "Hermione" group is not his best poetry, but the third lyric, "The Dead Letter," is admirable for the fusion of the end of one line with the beginning of the next, so that the rhymes are barely perceptible, and the rise and fall of the speech natural. It is hard to take Sill's poems apart for the sake of quotation—usually a murderous process. Here is the quiet conclusion of the third movement:

> I burned the page that brought me love and woe.
> At first it writhed to feel the spires of flame,
> Then lay quite still; and o'er each word there came
> Its white ghost of the ash, and burning slow
> Each said: "You cannot kill the spirit; know
> That we shall haunt you, even till heart and brain
> Lie as we lie in ashes—all in vain."

The delicate use of alliteration, the tonal changes of vowels, the shifting of accents—it is for such slight things this man may safely be called a poet.

"The Crickets In The Fields" compares the insects' undersong in a murmuring world to the underthought of one whose revery is permeated with a distant shape and voice. "Warning," opening with the human longing, "Be true to me," gradually modulates to the less selfish, more objective ideal:

> But nay,
> Not true to me: true to thine own high quest
> Of truth; the aspiration in thy breast,
> Noble and blind, that pushes by my hand,
> And will not lean, yet cannot surely stand;
> True to thine own pure heart, as mine to thee
> Beats true. So shalt thou best be true to me.

This psychologist of human relations could treat his own tragedy lightly by comparing the "poets' ways" with the "silly bird" who is mute when his mate is near and starts singing as soon as she is flown. "The Thrush" is an exquisite lyric in which Nature again receives a human application. The bird "has lost his last year's love," and forgetting her, can sing where a man is silent. Perhaps the finest of the love poems is the beautifully sustained, "A Memory." It unfolds the psychological subtlety of later writers without soaring into modern abstractions. It presents no extraneous difficulties to the reader. It is all there the first time, along with those over and undertones that sound long after the close. The poet is sitting on a "barren, lonely hill" with one engaged to another. Her "unconscious witchery" raises the ghost of his own beloved, and, conscious that he has no right to feast upon the girl at his side, he asks:

> Was it before my fate I knelt—
> The human fate, the mighty law—
> To hunger for the heart I felt,
> And love the lovely face I saw?
> Or was it only that the brow,
> Or some sweet trick of hand or tone,
> Brought from the Past to haunt me now
> Her ghost where love was mine alone?
> I know not; but we went to rest
> That eve, from songs that haunt me still,

> And all night long, in visions blest,
> I walked with angels on the hill.

But Sill is shattered neither by love nor long lost love. In "The Venus Of Milo" and in the lyric, "Recall," he turns from the all-too-human to a love more universal.

> Or is my love but Marguerite's ox-eyed flower,
> That I should stand and pluck and fling away,
> One after one, the petals of each hour,
> Like a love-dreamy girl, and only say,
> "Loves me," and "loves me not," and "loves me"? Nay!
> Let the man's mind awake to manhood's power.

Sill turned to the world, Nature, God, with a medley of faith and skepticism. The romantic yearning of his period is controlled by a scientific love of precision. In the sonnet, "Nature And Her Child," we find the "world-heart" nursing Man, standing helplessly "dull and dazed" behind his "windowless" soul. Usually, Man woos Nature in poetry; here he is thrust into a reflective, secondary place in accordance with the rapidly developing sciences of the century. A good deal of the post-war despair of our recent generation is the outcome of an over-development of this theme. The ego has learned too much about its littleness and is unable to adjust itself to time and space. We have entered, not a new realism—as some young writers pride themselves—but a new romanticism: the ego cannot accept facts as they are—if they are facts. The lyrical Sill was able to balance hope and despair, not through resignation, but acceptance. In "Truth At Last," after asking whether Man ever resigns hope and faces "the grim fact, seeing it clear as day," he indicates a mountain climber who, just before the fall of an avalanche, "turned round, face forward, calm and pale, stretching his arms out toward his native vale as if in mute, unspeakable farewell, and so went down—from doubt, or fear, or hope's illusion free." The last syllable holds and releases the burden of the entire poem. Chronic illness and temperamental solitude must have given Sill ample time to study life in the large and to compose his deliberate poems. Some phase of the non-conforming Transcendentalists clung to his acceptance of

scientific findings. In "Home," the belief in immortality is sounded, and in "Reverie," in the face of "an empty waste of endless sea,"

> Where the waves mourned for what had never been,
> Where the wind sought for what could never be,

the poet yearns for "some mystic sign to touch the dead world to a life divine."

Herein one catches cadences of the Pacific Ocean and of that California of which Sill was a fine interpreter. His California poems have none of the grandeur of Miller's best work; they are more akin to the Bryant who sought an escape from civilization. They have, then, a negative rather than a positive value. But the day had not yet arrived when a man could accept the ways of mankind as serenely as he had once accepted the ways of Nature or of God. It remained for Whitman to encompass this, the most arduous of human problems. But Walt was a prophet who beheld himself in his fellows and idealized the race in his own grand image. In any event, the escape from man to Nature is a defeatist adventure. While one admires hermits like Sill for their artistry, one deplores the absence of humanity from the natural scene. None the less, "Among The Redwoods" is a superb poem. From the opening address,

> Farewell to such a world! Too long I press
> The crowded pavement with unwilling feet,

deep into the heart of giant trees, the "enormous solitude of silent space," where "the hollow dome is green with empty shade," and where, like Karnak's temple, "uprose dim, monstrous columns in their dread repose," one follows Sill to the cadence:

> If death be but resolving back again
> Into the world's deep soul, this is a kind
> Of quiet, happy death, untouched by pain
> Or sharp reluctance. For I feel my mind
> Is interfused with all I hear and see;
> As much a part of All as cloud or tree.

Moved by "a deep and solemn wind on high," the trees turn to "mighty masts."

> The cloudy sails are set; the earth-ship swings
> Along the sea of space to grander things.

Of the other California poems, each disclosing further plasticity, the finest are, "Tranquillity," "Solitude," "Summer Afternoon," "California Winter," "The Life Natural," "Sundown," "A Resting Place." The titles themselves are autobiographical. If Sill sought himself in the woods, he also knew the ego is only at peace in self-forgetfulness. In "The Secret," the poet, leaving his "solitary tent" for "the world's bright garden," labors at "weed and root," and "the blessing came because it was not sought,"

> The beauty and the wonder all thy thought,—
> Thyself forgot.

In "A Tropical Morning At Sea," we are warned against the balmy living in Nirvana California:

> Swung to sleep by the swaying water,
> Only to dream all day—
> Blow, salt wind from the north upstarting,
> Scatter such dreams away.

It must have been such a mood which drove the Yankee back East to the concentrated activities of his last few years. It is fitting to examine the New England poems showing how much later poets, like Robinson and Frost, owe this lonely pioneer. The resemblances—they are never imitations—come out of Sill's portraits and the curious irony he brought to bear on them. In "His Last Day," an old man looking back tries to tell,

> With a smile a little grim,
> Why a world he loved so well,
> Had no larger fruit of him.

Somewhere along the way, he has forgotten to reckon one of the days of the calendar and has missed the chance to do a remembered thing. We find this note again in Robert Frost. "Fulfillment," opening with a dirge-like description of the skies,

portrays a man moping in his room, and "hating nature's hostile look." Suddenly, in response to a sunny day and feeling good news at hand, he "flung his gloom away." The news turns out to be his own Death, calming his "fretted pulse." Of the cryptic Robinson and the later and still more cryptic Eliot, we have a foretaste in "Roland," "a foolish creature full of fears."

> With timid foot he touched each plan,
> Sure that each plan would fail;
> Behemoth's tread was his, it seemed,
> And every bridge too frail.

"Her Explanation," "Eve's Daughter" and "Strange" are among the other poems belonging to our age of psychological poetry. In "Her Explanation," tragedy and irony blend in a fashion typical of Robinson. Sill, like the Maine poet, was a master of the form I have chosen to call the American sonnet. One might even claim he was its inventor. He infused the austere old form with a life and expression indubitably Yankee. At the same time, this dramatic monologue owes a good deal to Browning—the man who played a large rôle in humanizing and developing later American poetry. The woman speaks:

> So you have wondered at me,—guessed in vain
> What the real woman is you knew so well?
> I am a lost illusion. Some strange spell
> Once made your friend there, with his fine disdain
> Of fact, conceive me perfect. He would fain
> (But could not) see me always, as befell
> His dream to see me, plucking asphodel,
> In saffron robes, on some celestial plain.
> All that I was he marred and flung away
> In quest of what I was not, could not be,—
> Lilith, or Helen, or Antigone.
> Still he may search; but I have had my day,
> And now the Past is all the part for me
> That this world's empty stage has left to play.

Sill was fond at times of lighter, musical fables. "Five Lives" is the best, but too long for quotation. "An Adage From The Orient" is concise, delicious and witty:

At the punch-bowl's brink,
Let the thirsty think
What they say in Japan:

"First the man takes a drink,
Then the drink takes a drink,
Then the drink takes the man!"

Like the father of Transcendentalism, Sill was constantly intoxicated, not with the grape, but with life, death and the beauty they brew between them. It is indeed a pity that, like the old man in "His Last Day," one must ask

Why a world he loved so well,
Had no larger fruit of him.

Meanwhile, we turn to another person drunken with life: a still profounder Yankee recluse, another loser of love, a poet even less known than Sill to the contemporary scene. In the twilight of Transcendentalism, a mad child was born at Amherst, Mass. It is to Emily Dickinson we turn as the evening star of her time and the greatest woman in the whole of American poetry.

XIV

THE TIPPLER LEANING AGAINST THE SUN

To pity those that know her not
Is helped by the regret
That those who know her, know her less
The nearer her they get.

Emily Dickinson.

WHEN Conrad Aiken introduced a British audience to a selection of Emily Dickinson's poems, he called them "perhaps the finest by a woman in the English language." Far from dissenting with the view, a number of English critics shared it, and one deleted the qualifying perhaps. Emily's posthumous fame has grown so glamorous and the mention of her name so exciting as to make the task of cautious criticism insurmountable. Four years after her death, her first volume appeared, and critics began abusing her for hitting below the belt of their fondest traditions. In all fairness to those gentlemen, one agrees she took liberties with grammar, syntax, metre and rhyme, made verbs play the part of nouns and adverbs of adjectives, divorced subjects from their predicates, embraced audacious ellipses and other scandalous non-conformities. Then one gives in to the drunken girl and goes drunken with her. One wishes, if one only could, to turn rowdy with her and go reeling about respectable thoroughfares, whether on earth or in heaven, and knock the planets and their Creator a little lopsided. The first things to topple would be all those flawless systems of poetry from Aristotle to Munson, Coleridge to Eliot, Mallarmé to Valèry. Emily's poetry, like the art of any original, is a system unto itself. Whatever theories it holds come after the performance—as the intuitive Whitman discovered about his own work. Walt and Emily, along with Forefather Emerson,

are the great American rebels; and the woman is fully the equal of the males. Best of all, we need no biography through which to apprehend her. She sang her own life and the life of the surrounding world that never caught her. Her poems reveal, in blinding, ecstatic array, not alone herself, not alone womankind, not alone America, but oneself, mankind and the universe. And the god she made in her own image—the "burglar, banker, father"—is the most intimate and irresistible democrat who has ever come down with Christendom. No church or schism can hold her delirium. It is the most pious and impious of creeds, and has the forest for its aisles, and a circumnavigating altar. The heart of a flying bird, never-for-more-than-a-moment alighting, is the all-in-one and one-in-all. Skepticism is the salt she drops on her tail: sanity catches the insane songster. Then she's off again, and no amount of science, of reason, of ratiocination, can catch her again, unless she employs these dreadful things herself. Only poetry—whatever that may be—can keep up with her.

And yet, this bird, bee, sailor, sun, cloud or star, seldom roamed beyond her house and garden. The house (still blessedly standing) was high enough to see from and not be seen. She needed no ship to sail her abroad, no train for Timbuctoo, no guidebook to Paris or Rome. Any required expatriation lay under the wings of her spirit: along their veins streamed her love of home, of self, family, neighbors, the earth, death and dreams of the beyond. One heard from her mostly through the mischievous scraps of singing paper she left about for Sister Sue and the family. No outsider saw these things, except for three or four a Boston lion prevailed on her to publish. Who could resist Colonel Higginson? And who can fail to be grateful to the handsome patriarch who gave us Emily and the Boston Symphony Orchestra? It was he who edited and introduced her first volume, 1890, and the books of '92 and '96 in which he was aided by Mabel Loomis Todd. Then, about the time the World War broke out, Emily's niece, Martha Dickinson Bianchi, added "The Singing Hound." The collected poems were issued ten years later, and also the "Life And Letters," edited by Mrs.

Bianchi. And only the other day, a volume of "Further Poems" was issued.

These are the main facts. Beyond them nobody need trouble himself. The many brief poems—such large things in little—tell all we need to know, puzzle over or sing along with. The immortal tippler reveals more of ourselves than we have the genius to convey. Only ecstasy can follow her ecstasy. Only the self grown forgetful can sail her empyrean. A line, phrase, epithet, makes our bodies lighter than air, and off we go. No need of fearing the consequences: the bird is human: another word lands us safely again. But which ecstatic bits can a mere surveyor of poetry call attention to? Here lie stout, juicy books with slips of paper between each pair of pages, slips intended as a guide to quotation and comment. Alas for so-called criticism, numerous pages are scored with several valiant checks. One tries to be systematic where no system exists. The three brave editors of the volumes are helpful: they have divided them into groups: Life, Nature, Time And Eternity, The Single Hound. But the headings are only approximate.

How can one reason with the madman, drunkard and lover? One might as well argue with love—the joyous love she poured so prodigally. Gayety, sunlight, audacity, are the salient motives of her music. At the height of her intoxication, she leaned, not against a lamp-post, but against the sun of her adoration. She is one of the rare Americans whom joy possessed; and it seized her among those musings on tragedy comprising nearly half of her poetry. She had every excuse for letting her spirit droop—she who fell in love and was loved and pursued by a man bound elsewhere by marriage. But nothing of the sort did she droop to. She was able to see the death in life and life in death, which brought her to so consistent a reference to an immortality happily removed from the glib beliefs of Longfellownians, or the reasoned rigmarole of the average Transcendentalist. She responded to her feeling sensibility. Feel is the only word among her poems she ever underscored. Despite her regard for science and reason, and the learned epithets she borrowed for some swinging mood, intuition is enough for her.

This is why she rarely wrote academically. She was too spontaneous for any world of people or of esthetic form to snare her. Her best poems—and how many are best—are complete in themselves. One may claim they aren't poetry, but one cannot claim they aren't Emily Dickinson. They require no signature.

Her joyousness is amazing in view of her Puritan background. To this freedom she was led by her master: the serene and equally eccentric Emerson. One need not consult Mencken and his brass band of followers for the most potent onslaught on Puritanism. They weaken their case by attacking the movement in toto and ignoring its virtues and graces. Emily undermined its evils simply by being herself and pouring out her vitality, comedy, wisdom and poetry. What an event it must have been to wake up with one of her notes—what a way to be greeted by the dawn! The air for which one yearns comes through the open window, not of the Menckens, but of the Emersons and Dickinsons.

At the head of Emily's collection, her editors placed her "letter to the world that never wrote to me." The poem, describing her as one who tells "the simple news" of Nature, concludes:

> For love of her, sweet countrymen,
> Judge tenderly of me!

She had every feeling for the actual world, but not for the symbols of success. As Mrs. Bianchi has shown—"nothing was mean or trivial" to Emily, "and her 'fainting robin' became a synonym of the universe." The word, fainting, lifts that fragment out of the commonplace. All through her work, she had an Elizabethan genius for the word or phrase that makes a passage live, and no flight was too daring for her imagination. It is this quality which startles the reader, transfixes his heart and sets his delirium going. Just enough is said to start him off—a clinking of glasses. When she wishes to "help one fainting robin into his nest again," the reader is likely to be the bird and to greet himself with a grin. She is a lover, a lover of all, and a wise lover:

I had no time to hate, because
The grave would hinder me,
And life was not so ample I
Could finish enmity.

Nor had I time to love; but since
Some industry must be,
The little toil of love, I thought,
Was large enough for me.

What an abundance of singing adventures her spirit unfolded! She deified the common by tossing aristocratic crowns onto democratic heads. She must have won the superterrestrial through a steady communion with Death. He is the most appealing character in her gallery; and the people are proud to join him:

How pomp surpassing ermine,
When simple you and I
Present our meek escutcheons
And claim the rank to die.

To him, Diadems and Doges drop, "soundless as dots on a disk of snow." This keen-eyed acceptance of what most people consider the dreadful event of their lives is based on the conviction that Death is no more than "the porter of my father's lodge." Still, Emily is thoroughly conscious of life's agonies; of disenchantment, disappointment. Hope to her is a light brother of Schopenhauer's grim vanity of desire:

His is the halcyon table
That never seats but one,
And whatsoever is consumed
The same amounts remain.

Providing "the apple on the tree" hangs hopelessly, "that 'heaven' is to me."

The number, variety and scope of Emily's single quatrains challenge Landor's for supremacy. The reduction of flesh and spirit to dissolution is encompassed in four simple lines:

It's such a little thing to weep,
So short a thing to sigh;

And yet by trades the size of these
We men and women die!

Here the word, "trades," has a universal connotation. In the next, "residence" and "furniture" carry Olympian overtones:

Who has not found the heaven below
Will fail of it above.
God's residence is next to mine,
His furniture is love.

Toward the past, toward time, toward failure, how infinitely tender the following four:

Look back on time with kindly eyes,
He doubtless did his best;
How softly sinks his trembling sun
In human nature's west!

And how compelling the contrasting sweep of images occasioned by the death of a friend:

Each that we lose takes part of us;
A crescent still abides,
Which like the moon, some turbid night,
Is summoned by the tides.

And her Puritan fortitude, so gayly worn, resorts like Emerson's to an intoxicating symbol:

The stimulus, beyond the grave
His countenance to see,
Supports me like imperial drams
Afforded royally.

There are literally dozens of quatrains that transport the imagination in less than the minute it takes to read them. She often conquers the reader in less time: as with Emerson, a line is enough. Here are samples of her electric stock:

Finite to fail, but infinite to venture.
A wounded deer leaps highest.
Hope is the thing with feathers.
Dust is the only secret.
He preached upon "breadth" till it argued him narrow.
A long, long sleep, a famous sleep.

One makes such a list at random; a systematic array would extend too far; and still farther when it comes to phrases and epithets. One need merely open the Nature poems for the gleaming characteristic. Frost is a "blond assassin" beheading flowers. The cricket has a "pathetic pendulum." The spider is a "neglected son of genius." The woodpecker has a worm for "his utmost goal." "A snake is summer's treason" creating "zero in the bone." The moon of redundant poets has "a chin of gold" for Emily, and at the full, "turns her perfect face upon the world below." The bat wears a "small umbrella, quaintly halved." When the autumn arrives, "the berry's cheek is plumper" and "the rose is out of town." In spring, woods are "nonchalant"—"as if the resurrection were nothing very odd!" The flower "bees prefer and butterflies desire" is a "purple democrat." Envying the grass with so little to do, Emily wishes she were "a hay!" Out of the festival of the first raindrops, "a few went out to help the brook, that went to help the sea," and, at the height of festivities, "the sunshine threw his hat away." How often she woos her darling, the bee, likewise Emerson's favorite. Here is a veritable book of bees; or of robins, blue jays, butterflies. What a delicious dig Puritans receive from a butterfly:

> How condescending to descend
> And be of buttercups the friend
> In a New England town!

And where is one to pick and choose in the Amherst garden, with the sun over all—the sun her god so often, the moon so rarely. Better let a lyric stretch full-length and chant the diurnal tale:

> I'll tell you how the sun rose,—
> A ribbon at a time.
> The steeples swam in amethyst,
> The news like squirrels ran.
>
> The hills untied their bonnets,
> The bobolinks begun.
> Then I said softly to myself,
> "That must have been the sun!"

. . . . . .

But how he set, I know not.
There seemed a purple stile
Which little yellow boys and girls
Were climbing all the while

Till when they reached the other side,
A dominie in gray
Put gently up the evening bars,
And led the flock away.

"Time" does not rhyme with "ran." "Begun," forced to rhyme with "sun," falls into bad grammar. Nor is the metre what it might be—in the hands of an academe. Here we revert to the grave topic of Emily's versification, and to her rebellious handling of science. That she was equal to the discoveries of her age is apparent in the accurate use of her similes and metaphors. But, just as she refused to apply reason as the final test of faith, science for her is too solemn and inconclusive in dealing with Nature. She says it all in the italicized word:

A color stands abroad
On solitary hills
That science cannot overtake,
But human nature *feels.*

Hospitable to science, she was shrewd enough to see that science had grown inhospitable to the imagination and art. Possibly the word, science, should be changed to scientists or to its narrow practitioners. That the artist approaches Nature through intuition and the scientist through reasoning—the one through beauty, the other through truth—is too exact in its categories. The scientist employs creative fire in hammering home his discoveries, while the artist takes hold of the coldest logic in shaping the final form of his molten emotions. Here one falls afoul of definitions the drunken Emily riddles:

I pull a flower from the woods,—
A monster with a glass
Computes the stamens in a breath,
And has her in a class.

Emily was too human to attach any one system to things. Those who insist on a scientific treatment of poetry had better

consult the determined gray dome of I. A. Richards in his "Science And Poetry." Here one learns, the poet has lagged too long too far behind science, and that he can only mature by applying its methods and vast discoveries to his adolescent art. But what is one to say after reflecting that many of these discoveries were apprehended through intuitive fellows like Goethe and Wordsworth? And what about the seer in Emerson? The Richards argument is by no means futile. One merely prays it will grow a little lighter, less pregnant with portentous finalities, a little more open to doubt, and to the eccentricities of Nature. If the scientist and philosopher have anything to learn from the artist, it is out of this note of doubt in the midst of certainty. It gives roundness and contrast to the artist's vision. One admires the latest rational interpretations on the part of pure thinkers; but they are inimical in the main to the daredevil feelings of an emotive person. The latter is not a romantic because he feels first and thinks second. He works on a personal basis; so does the logician. The history of science is the record of a succession of subjective apprehensions of an objective goal. The final impersonality has never been attained, either by artist or scientist. And how fortunate, how very fortunate this is!

> So keep your secret, Father!
> I would not, if I could,
> Know what the sapphire fellows do,
> In your new-fashioned world!

If Emily Dickinson is comparable with Blake in her dynamic mysticism, with Emerson in her intoxicated independence, and with the Elizabethans in her daring range of imagery, she is also fascinating as the first and best of American women poets. It is of course absurd to divorce poets into men and women, and to say of a certain one: she writes well for a woman. Such dicta are the residue of Victorianism, and of an artist like George Moore, who once praised women-artists in a niggardly style and consigned them to staying merely beautiful and reserving their arts for love and the household. It is apparent that the modern woman, in penetrating worldly affairs, has seized an active part in shaping a career independent of masculine dominance or fe-

male dependence. One of the healthiest signs in present-day American poetry is the large and invaluable contribution being made by what used to be patronizingly termed, the weaker sex. Critics like the astute Edmund Wilson even asseverate that the artistic qualities of the women's work outweigh those of the men. The esthetic achievement of so many different women is indeed delightful. But I am inclined to add that where most of them surpass Emily Dickinson in technical accomplishment, usually indicated by an absolute mastery over cold, hard form, they have much to learn from the tippler in the graver concern of philosophy, detachment and wit. Next to her hearty acceptance of the sum of life, most of these women wear an air of martyrdom and self-pity, especially in their reaction to members of the masculine persuasion. Too many seem to have no other reaction to life but love, no other response to love but sex, and no other conclusion to sex but disillusionment. This vein, for all its importance and power, tends to an ultimate monotony if repeated in all the keys and modulations of poetry. There is no such self-pity in Emily—even at the height of revealing her love for the man from whom she was impelled to run away. Her love poems—the smallest section of her volumes—have a Shakesperean gusto. One sees in her not some moon-sick Juliet, but a bewitching Rosalind, striding the woods in boots, and pinning love-notes on the trees. Wit and wisdom partake of her passionate affection. In electing the man of her choice, she can sing on square-shouldered terms:

> Behold the atom I preferred
> To all the lists of clay!

That their love was no glib relation, that agony stabbed and re-stabbed it, may be found in the broad verse:

> You left me boundaries of pain,
> Capacious as the sea,
> Between eternity and time,
> Your consciousness and me.

The slightest doubt on his part drives her to a favorite image: her Calvary of woe. Her yearning, sometimes closing with a

girlish longing to "dwell timidly with thee," at others is forthright and proud. Nowhere in American poetry is there a grander sweep than the lyric beginning:

> If you were coming in the fall,
> I'd brush the summer by
> With half a smile and half a spurn
> As housewives do a fly.

This lyric broadens to a year, centuries, eternity, and drops to the poignant:

> But now, all ignorant of the length
> Of time's uncertain wing,
> It goads me, like the goblin bee,
> That will not state its sting.

The coquettish side of Rosalind is evidenced in the "happy letter" sent to him; and the passionate in the breathless fragment, "Wild nights! Wild nights!" For the primordial problem of chastity, the erotic bee is employed once more. Despite tragic implications, the poet tells the tale lightly, and ends it with an exquisite parody of a Victorian popular novel:

> Did the harebell loose her girdle
> To the lover bee,
> Would the bee the harebell hallow
> Much as formerly?
>
> Did the paradise, persuaded,
> Yield her moat of pearl,
> Would the Eden be an Eden,
> Or the earl an earl?

This tantalizing subtlety can turn to adoration spaciously humble; and if the lover doubt his bird, Puritan Rosalind sings:

> Split the lark and you'll find the music,
> Bulb after bulb, in silver rolled . . .

Just why she renounced the suit of her friend is left out of her poetry. This choice discovery may be left to some wise psychoanalyst. He may detect that Emily was to be captured not even by love, and, in the interest of picturesqueness, conclude that she renounced the world, along with erotic temptation, and

became the "nun of Amherst" roaming the imagination. And yet, there are the exultant lines:

> Title divine is mine
> The Wife without
> The Sign.
> Acute degree
> Conferred on me—
> Empress of Calvary.

Whatever the cause of the parting, there is no self-pity, no bitter accusation, on the side of the humane woman. There is something larger, nearer completeness and detachment, in the refusal to name the whip by which that "magic creature," the heart, fell, and in the will "to sing unto the stone of which it died."

The "gypsy face transfigured" by love turned from love to time and eternity: the rooms of her house and paths of her garden became the centre of her cosmic musing. Nothing in poetry can be more tedious than the cosmic utterance. Emily, too ecstatic to drag any one mood too far, was blessed with that antidote against the cosmic: the comic. Even her Lord has to suffer her mischievous banter. Like the Chinese, she accepted death or news of death, not in mourning, but in white:

> If tolling bell I ask the cause.
> "A soul has gone to God,"
> I'm answered in a lonesome tone;
> Is heaven then so sad?

From most of the advance accounts we have had of heaven, no matter what the color of the race clasping its hands in supplication, one falls to the supposition that heaven is truly the saddest of havens, and not the place to nurse the ills mankind has endured below. If we are to credit Emily's hypothesis, the upper realms are no longer so terrifying. One even dares to hope that the "Burglar, Banker" has given the tippler an inn to preside over, lest the dry go thirsty forever and the solemn rule the skies in an endless round of sobriety. Though there was little news of her death on earth, one likes to fancy gayety greeted "the debauchee of dew" landing at the Gate:

Till seraphs swing their snowy hats,
And saints to windows run,
To see the little tippler
Leaning against the sun!

Now that she is gone over forty years, it is easier to estimate Emily Dickinson in perspective. She had more "faults" than any of her contemporaries: the unerring critic has no difficulty in enumerating them. While her isolation gave her the opportunity of an untrammeled existence, it also deprived her of those finer phases of publicity which would have given her the basis of a keener self-criticism. Her poems would have achieved a more flowing music, a closer approximation of that perfection so universally admired. None the less, a careless critic cannot resist concluding: In a world so full of perfect poets, let us have at least one irresistibly imperfect. Now and then, the constraints of perfectionism are much too much like the walls of a dutiful existence. It is time to throw open doors and windows, and to leave the library to librarians. It is high time for an uncharted adventure. If one is too lazy to use one's legs, a book can lift the spirit out of an armchair. But there are only a few on the shelf. Emily's is one of these—sometimes the only one. Even here, she said it conclusively:

There is no frigate like a book
To take us lands away,
Nor any coursers like a page
Of prancing poetry.

These lines afflict the reader as poetry afflicted their author. For even Emily attempted a definition in one of her madcap letters:

> If I read a book and it makes my whole body so cold no fire can ever warm me, I know it is poetry. If I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off, I know this is poetry. These are the only ways I know it.

XV

WHITMAN AND THE DEMOCRATIC COSMOS

Divine am I inside and out, and I make holy
whatever I touch or am touch'd from . . .
Walt Whitman.

THE year 1819 gave birth to the great American primitives, Whitman, the epic lover, Melville, the epic hater; and to Lowell, the scholarly champion of the Union. These men, so different in their endowments and records, died fairly close together: Melville and Lowell in 1891, Whitman the following year. Walt and Whittier survived the leading poetic figures of the Nineteenth Century, the New York Quaker surviving the New England Quaker by six months. When Whitman was born on Long Island, Bryant was only twenty-five, and a few years later removed to New York and settled there. How closely the first and last figures of the century were related. When Walt was old enough to wear a beard and slouched about the streets he adored all through life, he was sometimes seen beside the man with the long white beard. Thus, the classic and radical founders of American poetry embraced on Manhattan Island. At the height of Transcendentalism, New York, given over to the clever songsters of the Knickerbocker School, was overshadowed by Boston; nor did the barbaric yawp penetrate the cloud. The first "Leaves Of Grass," printed by their author in 1855, were received with ribaldry at home and almost total indifference elsewhere. Did not "Hiawatha" appear soon after, and did not that sentimental distortion of Indian legendry catch the hearts of Americans to the extent of thousands of sales? How could the sale of a single copy of the Leaves prevail against such a flood, and of what immediate avail the marvelous tribute paid to Mr. Walter Whitman by a Concord cor-

respondent who signed himself, R. W. Emerson? He called the crude little volume, "the most extraordinary piece of wit and wisdom that America has yet contributed," prophesied that its author was "at the beginning of a great career," and concluded: "I wish to see my benefactor, and have felt much like striking my tasks, and visiting New York to pay you my respects."

Manhattan, if it noticed the book, laughed at the frontispiece of the man in laborer's attire, ridiculed the pretentious preface and shuddered at the indecencies of the so-called poems. Whittier, the one man-poet of Whitman's class, threw the book into the fire. The book was intended for the divine average and the average ignored it, as to this day they ignore it. In the literature of the world, there is no greater irony, no greater tragedy, than the neglect paid by the people to a man of genius embracing the gamut of the common American and lifting it to a continuous chant resounding round the earth. Walt, during his lifetime, was read almost solely by the class he attacked most: men of letters and even some rhymesters. The average man took to his bosom the softer jingles of a poet who brought Europe to America and fled his native shores as often as he could. A prophet in advance of his time, Walt's future is hard to appraise even now. He was complete in himself: the complete individual and mass, complete native and universalist. And he called not for followers, but for other originals. For years after his death, poetry drifted back to the rhyming he scorned as an echo of moribund foreign models. With the advent of the free verse movement, the spirit of Whitman was reborn, but reborn, it now appears, in only a few men as daring as himself. Other later radicals concerned themselves with another thing he despised: form for its own sake. This phase turned back or moved forward to a renewal of interest in classical models: to the present movement in the direction of a harder, clearer, sophisticated metrical scheme. As for the even profounder matter of the American spirit, of the democratic faith to which Walt built the grandest monolith, much of this has been discredited by disillusion or skepticism, and a tendency to decry nationalism in literature. Only the other day, a young classic

poet just out of Harvard assured me that Whitman would be extinct not far hence. I wanted to ask whether the young classic poet would be the one to rise on Walt's ashes; but the new prophet had already turned on his heel. Whitman had a terrific battle for recognition during his lifetime, and now apparently the battle has to be fought again—on this side the Atlantic, if not on the other.

The shrewd Emerson, who never praised indiscriminately, must have found in his "benefactor" elements of his own Transcendentalism. The tender, human fibre of Walt's nature had come to him through the Dutch blood of his mother; but the earliest Whitmans to embark from England for the Colonies had been Puritans, including ministers of the gospel. The biblical character, the tremendous moral tone of the chants—rarely touched with lightness or humor—reveal the poet's forefathers, while the immense maternal sympathy derives from the Van Velsors. The cosmic implications, so rudely announced in the first Leaves, and raising the ego to godhood, lay in the true descendancy of Emerson's Brahma. How much more forthright, less subtle, was the challenge of the younger poet. Throughout life, the Concord bard had longed to speak out and embrace things, people, friends, anything and everything. Here was one who embraced them all, the actual as well as the theoretical, evil and good, body and soul. The carefully shrouded body of the Yankees suddenly appeared in the most intimate nudity. For the first time in American letters, the body came into its own and, in the temple the poet erected from year to year, the body had a noble place. Here at last, a magnificent man, a large, imperturbable animal, compact of passion and serenity, had emerged from the land of the people. Here was no exquisite spirit, preaching democracy for the aristocracy and mixing with the race solely in theory, but the one man, more than any other before or since, who developed in himself a polyglot self-portrait of the seething mass. His superb vitality was allied with a personal magnetism to which men who met Whitman have attested. He had a superhuman appetite for love, for giving and taking it. Strange indeed that

the poems had so little effect on the times, poems containing the completest declaration of independence the youthful race had ever seen, the most fervent call to democracy ever penned by man.

Luckily for the future of the Leaves, Walt was a fanatic of the highest order. He saw not the times, but the ages, and built, not buildings, but pyramids. Like the work of every great primitive, the work he left at his death was unfinished, and subject to the obvious faults the obvious of mind are the first to discover. This man of all men had set himself the heroic task of chanting the symphony of the whole human race, and his country could give him little of the conglomerate help which aids in the making of perfect epics. Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, Goethe, summed up in themselves the ideals and records of fully developed races. Whitman's race was still adolescent as a cultural group; was still engaged in the further physical conquest of a continent a small portion of which it had seized less than fifty years before the poet's birth. The huge, ingenuous child in Whitman had an indomitable faith in himself, his people, Nature, immortality. Such faith rises at the beginning of things; self-analysis, doubt, detachment, sophistication, esthetic balance, arrive at a maturer period. Such is the conclusion one is tempted to form before opening the Leaves again. Then, alas for rational deductions, one is inundated and drowned by the dithyrambic tides.

One comes to grips with an overwhelming personality, with endless vistas and peoples; one is brought face to face with one's own dimensions—heart and mind, body and spirit, largeness and littleness—littleness most of all. The tremendous challenge has not yet been answered. The human mountain and sea loom higher and deeper. If there is something wrong somewhere, we must search this side of the Leaves. Whitman's esthetic counterpart has not yet arrived. The most inspired men of the race are still concerned with the perfection of details: details of life, of science, of art. The embrace of the perfect American has not yet completed the embrace of the primitive giant. One is abashed before Walt; one would love to tell him that the great

brood of national singers have arrived, each an independent answer to Walt's serene expectation of "the main things from you." Finer, more perfect, more varied singers are here, each a valuable asset, each another new note in the polyglot symphony. But the "native, athletic, continental" giant of Walt's wide vision is not yet among them. To many fine books which have followed the close of the Nineteenth Century, one may apply his slogan: "Who touches this book touches a man." But the man is never so great as the sprawling animal of Nature; nor has he the passion to drive everything before him—including the most tenacious of our cultivated prejudices. Reason, intellect, critical gifts, cannot grapple with Walt's herd of buffalos trampling the continent. It has taken the Leaves, and it still takes the Leaves, to make one confess it.

> Shut not your doors to me, proud libraries,
> For that which was lacking on all your well-fill'd shelves, needed most, I bring . . .

Such egoism is the reflection of genius. Austere confidence sustained Whitman in the midst of racial neglect. Though he stooped to shady methods in advertising his book, and dressed and acted the part of the poet of the race, he took his further defeats with elephantine equanimity. The race had not called him forth of its own volition. Busy with needful material concerns, the race would come to him later—time enough for that long after his earthly demise. And the people would find themselves not in Walt, but in themselves.

> You shall no longer take things at second or third hand, nor look through the eyes of the dead, nor feed on the spectres in books,
> You shall not look through my eyes either, nor take things from me,
> You shall listen to all sides and filter them for yourself.

In a moment of rare humor, this "Song Of Myself" admits that the "hawk swoops by" and "complains of my gab and my loitering." The poet responds, he too is "not a bit tamed . . . I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world." The

chant closes with a serene acceptance of fate at the hands of the reader: "If you want me again look for me under your boot-soles . . . I stop somewhere waiting for you."

As early as the poem, "Starting from fish-shape Paumanok where I was born," the multiple, democratic I is announced and developed. The figurative Walt is described as "a miner in California, or rude in my home in Dakota's woods." He did not go West until fairly late in life, nor travel beyond Denver. Like Emerson, he was apathetic toward the gold rush of 1849. It is clear, then, that the poet chants a racial, more than a personal experience. His famous catalogues of names and places—often so interminable—project the imaginative ego through all times and peoples. It is useless to beg Walt to restrain the rolling catalogues. Once they begin, one has to enjoy and suffer them to the full length and breadth of their march. At the heart of his redundancy, one feels that the poet did not trust the intelligence of his readers. He left nothing unsaid; left nothing for the imagination to fill in. If he starts with one river, one state, one city, he must give us most of the others—like a geography teacher in front of a dull class. Sometimes lines of these names have a musical swing; at others, they decline to prosaic monotony. For once, one longs for aristocratic selectiveness, for the revision of the esthete, the artist, the self-critic. When the catalogues are charged with emotion, the method is thrilling and mounts to dramatic conclusions:

> Having studied the mocking-bird's tones and the flight of the mountain-hawk,
> And heard at dawn the unrivall'd one, the hermit thrush from the swamp-cedars,
> Solitary, singing in the West, I strike up for a New World.

Determined to plant all things equally, Whitman allowed a democratic flatness to halt the swinging movement of his chants. This prime fault is not so prevalent in the later chants. He had begun to master the art of variation on a given theme.

Once he had arrived, by slow degrees of self-training, at a medium to embody the mission he had found in himself, he set up a well-nigh superhuman technical ideal. The first Leaves

were not the outcome, technically, of an American tradition. He had to create his own tradition, partly aided by the glorious dithyrambs of the biblical prophets and of the visionary Blake. Creating this tradition, he had to shape a language fresh, virginal and indigenous to his native soil. To this outdoor speech, he sometimes added a bookish word, a coined word, or some foreign word like the French and Spanish he gathered on his trip to New Orleans. It was not until his thirty-sixth year that the first Leaves appeared. Six years later, the Civil War overwhelmed him, and he thrust himself into the purgatory of battlefields and hospital camps, where, as a voluntary wound-dresser, he visited nearly a hundred thousand men. Near the close of the war, some wound infected him and led to the paralysis which slowly undermined his superb constitution. The last twenty years of his life were spent in grappling with the subtle monster. The monster won the battle. His artistic achievement against continuous odds is one of the glories of the human race. Fortunately, a genius for loafing among his fellows gave him ample time for setting down his copious notes on every conceivable theme.

If poetry, as Wordsworth said, is "emotion recollected in tranquillity," Whitman had a divine share of both qualities. He had the imperturbability of a prehistoric mammal, no physical or psychic wound could destroy. He accepted the thought of death with similar equanimity: death was even greater than life. Out of his inner passion and outer serenity, great chants were sure to shape themselves. The handicaps that crippled his muse at times, and crippled his readers in turn, were rarely more than momentary obstacles to the flow of his majestic song. In the earlier chants, the song may be rather forthright and crude, too jubilant and brassy. The war served to vary and deepen the keys and instrumentation, and grief to render the joys more human and less superhuman. Whitman, closer to the soil than any poet before him, was akin to the first settlers of the continent. His Leaves, more truly than any history or philosophy, ecclesiastic or scientific record, are the story of

the race. In the Paumanok song, the profoundly simple folkish heart sang what the race had achieved and the forefathers set in motion:

> Victory, union, faith, identity, time,
> The indissoluble compacts, riches, mystery,
> Eternal progress, the kosmos, and the modern reports.
>
> This then is life,
> Here is what has come to the surface after so many throes and convulsions.

The more one greets the jubilant tone, the less one wonders at it. Walt, child of the mass, felt the mass in himself—never himself apart. What more natural than the faith that the mass must finally greet, not the poet, but itself? What more natural than the recourse to his own printing press whenever publishers, critics and public failed him? He had always made a living with his huge, sensitive hands. What more natural than his love of labor and the laboring class? True—only the philosoph and literatus cared for him now. So proud was he of Emerson's tribute that, without consulting the sage, he printed in gold on the back of the second edition: "You are at the beginning of a great career." The "master" was vexed with the "benefactor," but what could one do with a man who even addressed himself with anonymous letters and then printed them as tributes from impersonal sources? Anything and everything was fair where the Leaves were concerned. If the people failed to buy their own chants, one must stoop to their favorite device: advertising. Walt had been nurtured in newspaper methods and read the reading of the average down to his death. These methods must be used for the people's advancement. One must even dress like them. No more the swallow-tail and stove-pipe of *The Brooklyn Eagle* days. A baggy suit, open collar, slouch hat and lusty beard—with clean linen always —this was the way of the laborer. No wonder people who did not read him adored the man. Cab-drivers, truckmen, ferry-boat handlers—all knew him intimately. He needed no readers

among them. When they had time to read, they would read him—plenty of time for that. Freedom and equality first, then leisure and loafing: loafing among the Leaves as well as life. A little advance publicity could do no harm. He had planned to reach an audience through lecture platforms, broadcasting democracy and using the Leaves as his text. But the orator only arose on a few cccasions; it remained for his prose to supplement the poems. So he went on reading aloud in the open air, testing the sound of the Leaves with Nature as a background—a test he had applied to Lord Shakespeare. As for men of the streets, country roads and hospital camps, why should they read Walt when they had the man himself: old Walt was no talker, but a listener. The listener is more irresistible than the gabby man. There was no limit to his silent sympathy, no affection like the great hands holding hands of the wounded of life and of war. He was always making little gifts: an apple, cigarettes, a letter to be written for a stricken soldier. The larger gift could wait: here was the man himself without cloth-bound covers. Did he care for books when people were about? The air, the earth, the sun, these were the things to follow. And everything under the sun, evil as well as good—"I am myself just as much evil as good, and my nation is." In the line to a "common prostitute"—"Not till the sun excludes you, do I exclude you"—Walt embraced the whole race.

In the long "Song Of Myself," he accepted the implications of evolution and the relation of atom to atom, but fought the doctrine of the survival of the fittest as he did the Calvinistic gospel of God's Elect. In this he was a son of democracy. He had delved so intimately into the lives of his fellows that he carried his gospel of equality to the most fanatical degree ever recorded. In love with himself without stint or evasion, he felt every man, woman and child in his own longing for completion: "What is commonest, cheapest, meanest, easiest, is Me." This individualism is not the aristocratic or hermitic individualism of Emerson or Thoreau, but of the man of the soil who finds failure on a par with success and looks upon slaves, wastrels and drunkards as worthy of veneration.

What blurt is this about virtue and vice? . . .
I moisten the roots of all that has grown. . . .
Whoever degrades another degrades me. . . .

In Nature, "I believe a leaf of grass is no less than the journey-work of the stars." Nor is Man the superior of animals.

They do not sweat and whine about their condition,
They do not lie awake in the dark and weep for their sins,
They do not make me sick discussing their duty to God,
Not one is dissatisfied, not one is demented with the mania of owning things,
Not one kneels to another, nor to his kind that lived thousands of years ago,
Not one is respectable or unhappy over the whole earth.

Walt was not alone "a kosmos, of Manhattan the son." He outbade "the old cautious hucksters," took upon himself "the exact dimensions of Jehovah," took part in Kronos, Zeus, Hercules, the gods of the Orient, of the Indian, of the Norse.

By my life-lumps! becoming already a creator,
Putting myself here and now to the ambush'd womb of the shadows.

The claim to godhead is always tempered by the appeal to the creator in others. While teaching his "athletes," he waits for one with a still broader breast: "He most honors my style who learns under it to destroy the teacher." A grain of humor tones the chant down to a human level:

I do not say these things for a dollar or to fill up the time while I wait for a boat,
(It is you talking just as much as myself, I act as the tongue of you,
Tied in your mouth, in mine it begins to be loosen'd.)

Thus we return to the Unitarian song of the one in all and the all in one. Just before the close of the chant, Walt borrows a passage from Emerson, slightly altered:

Do I contradict myself?
Very well then, I contradict myself,
(I am large, I contain multitudes.)

No wonder the modest sage considered Whitman his benefactor.

In "Children Of Adam" and "Calamus," Whitman paid mature tribute to the love between man and woman, man and man. Here is no fig-leaf or false restraint; the outlines are as clear as in Nature. The chants composing "Children Of Adam" might have been sung in the garden of Eden, so free are they from the subtleties of modern love. In the direct language of man among the animals, the nature of love—nature without art—is revealed. The poems horrified Walt's generation to the roots of their Puritan modesty. Emerson, who felt no such prudery, urged him to postpone the Children to some later edition in order not to alienate his slowly growing public. Their historic debate is recorded in the Camden poet's memoirs. For two hours they walked Boston Common.

> . . . he was the talker and I the listener. It was an argument-statement, reconnoitering, review, attack, and pressing home (like an army corps in order, artillery, cavalry, infantry). . . . More precious than gold to me that dissertation . . . I could never hear the points better put—and then I felt down in my soul the clear and unmistakable conviction to disobey all, and pursue my own way.

Emerson was rather vexed when the third edition appeared with the Children intact. His serene privacy was invaded with tactless letters charging him with championing Whitman. But his friendship for the great tramp never wavered: they continued to see each other and to correspond at intervals. The one inexplicable event in their relations is Walt's absence from Emerson's anthology, "Parnassus." There is no accounting for this strange blot in the Concordian's Olympian career. In England, where Whitman found his first audience, aside from the few disciples who crowded about him at home, objection to the Children had been voiced by W. M. Rossetti, and Walt agreed to leave them out of the English edition. The finest chapter in the history of English appreciation of American authors dates from the loyalty to Whitman on the part of the Rossettis, Ruskin, Swinburne, Symonds, Anne Gilchrist and others. To the English edition, 1868, W. M. Rossetti prefaced the comment

that the Leaves "realized the greatest work of our period in poetry." Swinburne wrote the impassioned poem, "To Walt Whitman In America," and also established the relationship between Blake and Whitman. A crowning essay came out in a Boston paper: "Judgment Of An English Woman On Walt Whitman." The unknown author, "a wife and a happy mother" who had learned "to feel something sacred in all," became the friend of his declining years. But to Mrs. Gilchrist's ideas of marriage, ideas she came all the way to America to fructify, Walt turned the same ear he had turned to earlier women. Even in his helpless age, he could not resign the freedom of bachelorhood. Of all concerns, his sex relations wore the most reticent aspect of confessions he made to friends. They have retained in their biographies, devoutly and correctly, a similar restraint. The Leaves tell all any man or woman need know about the poet's lovelife. Peeping Toms may snoop for the unwritten.

In the light of later literature, in which sex has become the outstanding theme for our poems, novels, plays and psychology, one does not shudder over Walt's revelations of the procreative urge. From "Pent-Up Aching Rivers," "I Sing Of The Body Electric," "A Woman Waits For Me," "One Hour To Madness And Joy"—these chants have been gratefully accepted in the body of our lives and letters. They now sound a little archaic with theory, a little too one-sided in their generative call, a little too physiological in their sweeping catalogues. Subtlety, humor, civilized aspects of courtship, the veils and games of sex, its comedies and tragedies, are missing, and missing still more, the woman's super-fantastic allurements of artistry. The long-winded catalogues are as precise as a book on biology; the music is too argumentative. The chants fall short of the full-blooded union of mind and body, of the complete relation between man and woman, wherein differences play as profound a rôle as harmonies. None the less, before Whitman, no American poet had dared more than mention sex, and mentioned it sentimentally. Walt was the pioneer in this, as in so many other fields.

The "Calamus" poems are finer than the Children, and richer in texture than any preceding group. The entrance of grief, doubt, unanswered longing, ushers in corresponding strings and woodwinds. The grand manner of the jubilant brasses is toned down with contrasting minor modes. The first of the poems is called "In Paths Untrodden." The poet is "resolved to sing no songs to-day but those of manly attachment," and he probes this, even for him daring field, with a refining restraint. One does not demand caution and nicety, but a balanced handling of comradeship. Apparently, Whitman was a greater lover of men than of women—hence the tireless extent of his healing campaign among soldiers. His perpetual call to democracy also partakes of the maternal side of his nature. In "Scented Herbage Of My Breast," he calls upon death to complete his life, the death that life may be solely intended for. This lonely accent, so rare in the other chants, reaches a point of scorn in the angry lines, "Whoever You Are Holding Me Now In Hand." He challenges the would-be follower: "Without one thing all will be useless:" a complete baring of hearts, with Walt the "sole and exclusive standard."

> But these leaves conning you con at peril,
> For these leaves and me you will not understand.

Since the poems will do just as much evil as good, the would-be comrade had better depart on his way. "Of The Terrible Doubt Of Appearances" bravely declares that life may be just an illusion and the grave "a beautiful fable only." The only answer to doubt can be had of friends.

> . . . I walk or sit indifferent, I am satisfied,
> He ahold of my hand has completely satisfied me.

One feels the poet was disappointed in the supreme friend. When he hears of the "brotherhood of lovers," he is filled with "the bitterest envy," and confesses:

> Here the frailest leaves of me and yet my strongest lasting,
> Here I shade and hide my thoughts, I myself do not expose them.
> And yet they express me more than all my other poems.

Near the close of the group, he admits that his love for a certain person was not returned—"Yet out of that I have written these songs."

"The Song Of The Open Road" is the jaunty counterpart of "Calamus." Here, "afoot and light-hearted," the poet is free of "indoor complaints," finds the earth sufficient and invites a world of companions along.

> Will you give me yourself? will you come travel with me?
> Shall we stick by each other as long as we live?

In the still more comradely poem, "Salut Au Monde," Whitman anticipates his most universal song, "The Passage To India," written toward the close of his life. In the antiphonal response to "What widens within you Walt Whitman," "What do you hear Walt Whitman," "What do you see Walt Whitman," the whole globe is saluted in America's name.

From Whittier to Whitman, Markham to Sandburg, labor has been exalted by poets. The worker receives the most exalted shoulders in Walt's "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," "Song Of The Broad-Axe," "Song Of The Exposition," "A Song For Occupations." In "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," one sees him at home among "the hundreds and hundreds that cross, returning home," the sea-gulls "high in the air floating with motionless wings," "the white sails of schooners and sloops," sailors in the rigging. This is the chant of his adored Manhattan, viewed from the rivers and harbor. The final stanza is a beautiful tribute to the incoming freight of cities and farms: "objects than which none else is more lasting." This transmutation of common things derives from the poet's Dutch ancestry, from a Dutch artist's love of still-life.

For some strange reason, "Song Of The Broad-Axe" opens with awkward rhymes and assonances. These are quickly dropped for the long swinging line in which the poet was more at ease. From the second stanza onward, the lines move to a mighty chant. Welcome is sung to "all earth's lands," each for its special trees, fruits, ores, products. There is a tribute to the

axe and its pioneer wielder, the beauty of daring persons, "of independence, departure, actions that rely on themselves—"

> The American contempt for statutes and ceremonies, the boundless impatience of restraint,
> The loose drift of character, the inkling through random types, the solidification . . .

Intuitively, Whitman limned the salient traits of the young, conglomerate race. After lumbermen and house-builders, the carpenter receives special affection: Walt was a carpenter who helped his father build two-family houses in Brooklyn. He might have amassed an ultimate fortune as a builder, but, to the continual amazement of his family, preferred a vagabond life. The chant proceeds to a philosophy of labor in which the person is exalted above the thing produced—whether house, ship or city. The free man is a citizen whom "President, Mayor, Governor and what not" serve for pay. And no community is complete without its women:

> Where the city of the cleanliness of the sexes stands,
> Where the city of the healthiest fathers stands,
> Where the city of the best-bodied mothers stands,
> There the great city stands.

The poem turns for awhile to a dark vision of "the European headsman," leaning on "a ponderous axe."

> (Whom have you slaughtered lately, European headsman?
> Whose is that blood upon you so wet and sticky?)

Among the martyrs of the axe, the poet beholds "those who in any land have died for the good causes." Then he sees the blood "wash'd entirely away from the axe." The headsman withdraws; the scaffold is "untrodden and mouldy"; the "friendly emblem of the power of my own race" takes charge. "Suddenly, the axe leaps" in the forest, and a swarm springs up—

> Hut, tent, landing, survey,
> Flail, plough, pick, crowbar, spade—

and the shapes of houses, hospitals, steamboats—"capitols of states, and capitol of the nation of states—factories, arsenals,

foundries, markets—railroads, bridges, ship-yards and dry-docks—the workmen busy outside and inside." Finally, "her shape arises, the main shapes arise—"

> Shapes of Democracy total, result of centuries,
> Shapes ever projecting other shapes,
> Shapes of turbulent manly cities,
> Shapes of the friends and home-givers of the whole earth,
> Shapes bracing the earth and braced with the whole earth.

Thus the great chant, in some respects his greatest, concludes.

Had Whitman failed to see the kinship between past and present, between Colonies and mother countries, his visionary America would have lacked verisimilitude. "Song Of The Exposition" unfolds his respect for the past. But the poet, asking the muse to "migrate from Greece and Ionia" and to "placard 'Removed' and 'To Let' " on Parnassus, felt that the greatest art was still to come out of his own soil. Pursuing his grandiose tone, he asks us to leave the feudal courts, "blazon'd with Shakespeare's purple page, and dirged by Tennyson's sweet sad rhyme," for America, "amid the kitchen ware!" He saves his mad argument by admitting—

> I candidly confess a queer, queer race, of novel fashion,
> And yet the same old human race, the same within, without . . .

After limning his ideal city, an Utopia not unrelated to Vachel Lindsay's Springfield, he tells labor and industry

> To exalt the present and the real,
> To teach the average man the glory of his daily walk and trade.

The limitless crops are to be dedicated to the sacred Union. And Walt postulates the heavenly theory that the "protectress absolute" would in turn take care of her offspring.

It is with some diffidence we now accept so confident a theory. Soon after Whitman, even during his lifetime, industrialism proved that the divine average could be as easily exploited as the peasants of baronial Europe. The visionary Jefferson foresaw the possible evils, as well as virtues, of the future democracy. The middleman or bourgeois class, as distinct a group as the

barons of the Middle Ages, were as certain to live luxuriously at the hands of labor, as kings on the backs of slaves. But the prophet is always right in stating his vision. If the human mass fails to follow, it is not the prophet's fault. Nor is the mass to be blamed for the later misleaders. The human race is simply not composed of equals—an aged truism as clear to Greek philosophers as it is to our disgruntled disillusionists. Jefferson's Declaration had asserted, "all men are born free and equal." The battle with Britain had been fought around this slogan. Democracy does not fall because of its insubstantiality. We are merely Whitman's "same old human race" marching the march of the ages. We have the right to elect our own rulers, which we do quantitatively, rather than qualitatively. Since the machines nominating candidates are controlled by men who own the machines by virtue of a richer materialism, the people elect the choice of the owners of most of the land. This is what Jefferson dreaded. Whatever land the worker owns is infinitesimal. He is a higher serf than the serfs of Egypt, Greece or an early Russia. As a man, he needs leaders and visionaries to interpret his own needs and to direct the battle for his rights. Unhappily, the Washingtons and Jeffersons, Emersons and Whitmans, are too often superseded by exploiters and misleaders. It is then the mass needs patriots and poets out of the lives of its own deep, dark midst. Or, to repeat Jefferson, "the shackles, therefore, which shall not be knocked off at the conclusion of this war (the Revolution), will remain with us long, will be made heavier and heavier, till our rights shall revive or expire in a convulsion."

In "A Song For Occupations," Walt insisted on an equal sharing of the fruits of labor. Here again, all men are viewed in their immortal heritage: even the greasy, the pimpled, the drunkard, the thief, the prostitute. Like the satirical Lowell, Whitman knew our rights were not to be read in "the President's message," reports from the State or Treasury departments, in the daily papers, in the census returns, "or any accounts of stock." The important thing is not the institutions produced, but the man and men who produced them. Walt has no ob-

jection to the high rate we place on "cash and business," on the Union, the Constitution, bibles and religions.

> I say they have all grown out of you, and may grow out of you still,
> It is not they who give the life, it is you who give the life . . .
> The sum of all known reverence I add up in you whoever you are . . .

There is no destroying so incomparable a faith in humanity. Anyone who despairs of the collective phase of the human race anywhere, must return to this prophet of the people.

Unlike most of his contemporaries, Whitman never crossed the ocean, but no American poet has ever written a sea chant comparable with "Out Of The Cradle Endlessly Rocking." It is compact of the very essence of Walt's immense tenderness in shaping the enduring majesty of grief over some one lost. As in other poems in which he is more concerned with chanting than with preaching or argument, the movement is remarkably spontaneous and restrained by the demands of a deliberate form. Though Whitman constantly revised his earlier poems, he did not always surmount the difficult mechanics of his art. Deficiencies which survived the poet are now the sole obstructions between the poems and the musical reader. The chants are not alone interrupted by catalogues. Even graver are the interpolations of the moralist, determined, like a cosmic showman, to display some natural marvel the crowd might overlook. In early life, Walt taught school for a time, and the methods of the teacher cling to some of the first chants. One cannot object to being harangued, providing the speech contains a plastic form in which matter and manner adhere. The plastic triumph of "Out Of The Cradle" shows that Walt might have mastered all the mechanics of his abnormal poetic scheme had he not been handicapped by economic needs, by the war, and by the physical prostration to which he was reduced. Indeed, to encompass the prodigious scheme he set himself, the poet could have used a number of lives, generations and eras. His true greatness lay in the insurmountable goal he fought for, a task akin to that of the novelists, Balzac and Dostoievski, or the

masterly American proseman, Herman Melville. The perfectionists of literature are admirable, but the heroes are the big fellows one cannot measure with a corrective ruler.

"Out Of The Cradle" owes its human thrill to the delicate parallel between the loss of the she-bird to the mocking bird and the loss of his mate to man. The poet does not personify the theme by delving into autobiography. The experience of the "two together," bird and bird, man and woman, is universal. On the musical side, the chant owes its power to the subtle, yet simple development of such refrains as Shine! shine! shine! referring to the sun; Blow! blow! blow! to the sea-winds; Soothe! soothe! soothe! to the waves; Loud! loud! loud! the call to the missing beloved; and finally, the turn from Loved! loved! loved! loved! loved! to the almost silent death, death, death, death, death. Bird, sea and man unite in chanting the last "delicious word." Whitman employed a similar device, with even profounder effect, in the threnody on the death of Lincoln. But one cannot leave the sea without some further reference to the poems of "Sea-Drift."

"As I Ebb'd With The Ocean Of Life" is permeated with an exquisite humility. Walking the shores of Paumanok, listening to the dirge of "the voices of men and women wreck'd,"

> I too but signify at the utmost a little wash'd up drift,
> A few sands and dead leaves to gather . . .

Walt is oppressed for having dared to open his mouth. Echoes of his "blab" recoil upon him and give him not "the least idea who or what I am." Before his "arrogant poems, the real Me stands yet untouch'd, untold, altogether unreach'd." "Peals of distant ironical laughter" greet every written word—"pointing in silence to these songs, and then to the sand beneath." As the sea was ever the final test of his poems read aloud, so he read aloud his life and philosophy. The sea-chants have this double appeal; likewise the earth-chants with their ebb and flow of existence. They round out the dual personality of the universalist. When Walt boasted he contained all, he was simply confessing a truth true of any member of the divine average. In

"Song Of The Redwood Tree," "A Song Of The Rolling Earth," "Birds Of Passage," what is Nature's is the property of any man or woman. The ego is not his own, but his fellows'. Again and again he reverts to the democratic cosmos:

> Whoever you are! you are he or she for whom the earth is solid and liquid,
> You are he or she for whom the sun and moon hang in the sky,
> For none more than you are the present and the past,
> For none more than you is immortality.

The war, which Whitman graced as self-appointed nurse and wound-dresser, mellowed rather than impaired his faith in the American destiny. "Drum-Taps" gives but an inkling of his journeys among the myriad dead and suffering. "The Wound-Dresser," opening with "An old man bending I come among new faces," and closing, "Many a soldier's kiss dwells on these bearded lips," renders a singing account of his humble vigils and duties. If it was possible for a man to be happy during these years, Walt was the man, for here he could pour forth, with little or no respite, the blood of his heart and hands. And here, in "Give Me The Splendid Silent Sun," he turned from Nature to his darling, the American man. Not only Manhattan and the North received his embrace, but likewise the South. "Reconciliation" is the finest poem of its kind—

> For my enemy is dead, a man divine as myself is dead,
> I look where he lies white-faced and still in the coffin—I draw near,
> Bend down and touch lightly with my lips the white face in the coffin.

Though Whittier and Lowell, Timrod and Lanier, led the vanguard of war poets, "Drum-Taps" remains the completest poetic diary of the war. How ironic the fate which dealt Walt an infected wound while serving the soldiers, and the spiritual wound inflicted by Lincoln's Secretary of the Interior, James Harlan. Whitman was then employed in the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and it chanced that the Secretary came across a copy of the Leaves in process of revision. Without giving the white-bearded underling a hearing, Harlan dismissed him. Walt took

the blow with his usual equanimity, but not so his friends. The fiery Celt, W. D. O'Connor, wrote his brilliant defense, "The Good Grey Poet." The poet never lacked for friends and champions. He probably had more disciples than any other author of his time. In an unguarded moment, Swinburne dubbed them the Whitmaniacs, and the silly invention hurt Walt profoundly. Since Emerson's tribute, ten years before, no such paper as O'Connor's had appeared. For the first time, the public was informed of Walt's service to literature. He won a post in the Attorney General's office and held it for seven or eight years. Many were the times he saw Lincoln and many the times they bowed in silent recognition of their mutual stature. Once Lincoln remarked, watching the Olympian figure on its balanced walk past the White House: "Well, he looks like a *man*."

Whitman was the man to voice the mood of the race after Lincoln's assassination. "When Lilacs Last In The Dooryard Bloom'd" is one of the greatest threnodies in literature. As in "Out Of The Cradle," Whitman built this chant out of a group of simple elements: a sprig of lilac, a fallen western star, the song of a thrush, the love of the nation. It is a sign of his genius that he chose such elements to interpret the nation's keenest tragedy, a tragedy akin to the Greek in its removal of the country's leader at the close of the Union victory. And how dramatically fitting that the assassin was the brother of the heroic tragedian, Edwin Booth. The fates wove their drama in the classic tradition, Whitman his pages in the American. In the returning spring, when Lincoln died, a sprig of the lilac bush with its heart-shaped leaves, plucked from the dooryard of an old farmhouse, is Walt's floral offering. The hermit thrush, nightingale of American birds, with its "song of the bleeding throat," sings

> Death's outlet song of life (for well, dear brother, I know,
> If thou wast not granted to sing thou wouldst surely die).

"Over the breast of spring," a coffin is carried, and, as the procession moves through the lanes and streets of the nation, the poet offers his sprig of lilac, not alone to this coffin, but to all

the coffins of "sane and sacred death." The western star, fallen from the heavens a month before, is recalled as a prophetic symbol; likewise the call of the hermit thrush. The various figures are developed with quiet majesty, and to these Walt adds his own chant. With "the knowledge of death" walking on one side and "the thought of death" on the other, the poet walks in the middle "as with companions," and proceeds "to the solemn shadowy cedars and the ghostly pines so still." Here the thrush receives the "comrades three" and sings "the carol of death, and a verse for him I love." The invocation to death, in which the man joins the bird, breathes with a soothing acceptance and mounting joy. To the four companions come "long panoramas of visions" made of the armies filing past again, with "hundreds of battle-flags . . . torn and bloody," and myriads of corpses and skeletons, "the débris of all the slain soldiers of the war." Among these visions, "the powerful psalm in the night" closes in utter tranquillity. It is not until these lines that Lincoln appears in full—like the major resolution of a contrapuntal Bach toccata. Of the other Lincoln poems, "O Captain! My Captain!" is the most popular, but one prefers the four unrhymed lines of "Hush'd Be The Camps To-day":

> This dust was once the man,
> Gentle, plain, just and resolute, under whose cautious hand,
> Against the foulest crime in history known in any land or age,
> Was saved the Union of these States.

We have since learned, even on the Northern side, that Southern secession was not a crime, but an assertion of the independent rights of sectional states to govern themselves and to protect the property of their forefathers: the aristocratic property in the slave. The Southern states were a living relic of European feudal systems, and the defense of their rights was the natural outcome of the traditions and training of Colonial times. But this is not the place to fight the war over again. In one of Whitman's richest poems, "By Blue Ontario's Shore," the Union is summed up in the aftermath of peace, and a future is outlined, vast in its dimensions and vaster still in its demands on

the poet to come. As Whitman grew older, his art developed—witness "The Passage To India," "The Sleepers," "The Mystic Trumpeter" and the shorter poems comprising "Autumn Rivulets," "Whispers Of Heavenly Death," "Songs Of Parting," "November Boughs" and "Good-Bye My Fancy." It is best for our purpose to consider "By Blue Ontario's Shore" in conclusion. In this poem, a severe standard is set for the future American. Though Whitman insisted that such a poet must go his own way, the poet of to-day or to-morrow, whether he write free verse or rhyme, is bound to compare his own effort with the barbaric yawp. It is not a question of form, but of magnitude of spirit.

During the closing Camden days, Walt, surrounded with growing disciples and distinguished visitors, had not yet come in touch with his people. The expenses of most later editions still came out of himself, aided by his staunch supporters abroad and at home. He accepted any help for the Leaves as deserving—vide "To Rich Givers"—and, if need be, went about Camden trying to sell copies at unfriendly house-doors. The continued public neglect was received with an Olympian poise: "They owed him nothing: why would he present the note for wares they had not asked for?" Applause went on coming from intellectual spheres, mostly British and Continental. Much though a man needs his people ("Without great audiences we cannot have great poets"), if you "produce great persons, the rest follows." Like many another genius, Walt moved about serenely conscious of his own magnitude. The Ontario chant echoes the yawp of "Song Of Myself" and addresses itself to the nation. Once more he insists on the rugged spirit as against the old-fashioned civilized. "Fear grace, elegance, civilization, delicatesse," and "beware what precedes the decay of the ruggedness of states and men." A parallel warning sprang from the pages of Nietzsche's passionate Zarathustra. The history of the nation is swiftly rehearsed, "from the haughty defiance of the Year One," and, listening to a Phantom by the shore, Walt hears the demand for bards "all native and grand," who, more

than our Presidents, shall be the "common referee" of the race. The poet must be made along noble lines; he is "the equable man," out of him come all things; "he is no arguer, he is judgment." And he judges "as the sun falling round a helpless thing," and, seeing farthest, has the most faith:

> He sees eternity less like a play with a prologue and dénouement,
> He sees eternity in men and women, he does not see men and women as dreams or dots.

From generalities, Walt turns to the particular: the applicant for poetry. This man (God help him) "shall surely be question'd beforehand by me with many and stern questions." A parade of questions passes in austere array. It is as if the future poet had to read aloud to Walt as Walt read aloud to the sea. The test is long and superhuman.

> What is this you bring my America?
> Is it uniform with my country?
> Is it not something that has been better told or done before?
> Have you not imported this or the spirit of it in some ship? . . .
> Can your performance face the open fields and the seaside?

Having answered these questions and more, what avails it if the race does not respond?

> (The proof of a poet shall be sternly deferr'd till his country absorbs him as affectionately as he has absorb'd it.)

What a passage for a man to write who had seen himself ignored and Longfellow absorbed on a wholesale scale! And yet, unlike Poe, Whitman had no hatred for the Cambridge poet, though he represented the pretty and the tinkling Walt abhorred. After Longfellow's death, Walt paid him a tribute "without asking that the notes be different from those of other songsters; adding what I have heard Longfellow himself say, that ere the New World can be worthily original, and announce herself and her own heroes, she must be well saturated with the originality of others, and respectfully consider the heroes that lived before Agamemnon." As late as June, 1890, the year before he died,

rejected by still another magazine, Walt wrote: "I am now set out in the cold by every big magazine and publisher, and may as well understand and admit it . . ."

In the Ontario poem, the poet, fired by the future vista, saw himself in its midst and demanded a return commensurate with his own faithful service. Here he sees not that America is democracy, but that he himself, the universal individual, is that elusive thing.

> America isolated yet embodying all, what is it finally except myself?
> These States, what are they except myself?

The short coda shapes a further invocation to the national bards. Many such have come at various times in various places. Whether they measure themselves by Whitman or not, accept or ignore him, they may well judge their labors by the best of the standards he set them. He did not ask for followers, but for further originals:

> Not to-day is to justify me and answer what I am for,
> But you, a new brood, native, athletic, continental, greater than before known,
> Arouse! for you must justify me.

XVI

THE RESPECTABLE DEMOCRACY

Poets! not in Arabia alone
You get beheaded when your skill is gone.
Thomas Bailey Aldrich.

NOT for naught had Whitman written his challenge: "Beware what succeeds the decay of the ruggedness of states and men." Despite his faith in democracy, the optimist must have seen ample evidence of the phenomenal growth of a middle class which seized and developed worldly lands and goods and bred in the race an adoration of property. In the literary markets he shunned, Walt beheld a conservation of the conservative; he stayed outside the editorial sanctums of metropolitan magazines. Though a few of his poems were accepted, he remained the great solitary of Nineteenth Century America. The people he wrote for were not the people Longfellow's followers wrote for. It may be assumed that not the independent individual, but the genial conformist is the accurate voice of the divine average whose numerical support is essential to the maintenance of national periodicals. With the decline of Transcendentalism and the rise of the machine and what we called progress, a corresponding faith in the triumph of good over evil, of the Union, one and indivisible, over all obstructions, gave birth to a much too facile confidence in a national millennium. Those who hated or dreaded the new régime, fled like Longfellow to foreign climes and brought back the latest, or even the oldest standards of culture. American poetry entered a period of glib conformity and pallid doubts: the transition of the Seventies, Eighties and Nineties produced a host of minor singers and moralists, difficult to define, so foreign are they to the ideals of an earlier democracy. Some of these poets held positions in the government or edited popular magazines and literary columns.

They preserved the sweeter morals and records of the Republic and worked still harder to transplant those of Victorian England. Sounding like Tories of Revolutionary America, they were more concerned with Shelley and Keats than with Emerson and Poe; with Tennyson, Lord of Britain, than with Whitman, yokel of the States. A few poets wrote some fair poems; the rest were wedded to feeble imitations of the past. Reading them now, one is thrust back not to a recent half century ago, but to the groping, inexperienced Colonial era. A name here and there saves an otherwise dubious situation, and our knowledge of the superseding renascence lends courage to a survey of the transitional perspective. Since several men and women who survived the literary wilds of the Reconstruction were among the harbingers of the new century, one may say that the richer efforts of the race had not completely died with Emerson and Whitman.

Before the Civil War, most of the land was devoted to parochial interests along the Eastern borders. The average literature reflected this spirit. The enormous energies roused by the war had the beneficent effect of forcing self-centred people into the fiercest conflict. Out of their first real knowledge of each other came the re-discovery of America, or what has been termed, the birth of a nation. With the expansion of the race and the development of new territories, Western literature arose under Twain, Harte, Miller and others. None of the poets of the movement had the three-dimensional scope of Whitman. They were as parochially interested in their immediate soil and people as were most of the Yankees, Southerners and New Yorkers before the war. But the young Westerners were the forerunners of a closer concern with reality as opposed to the lofty dream of the hereafter on the part of Puritans and Transcendentalists. The plow had removed the library, and the speech of the plow overruled the language of the classics. The colloquial lexicon with its picturesque slang caught the fancy of the nation. The "Pike County Ballads" of Harte and Hay and the Mississippi epics of Twain ushered in a new romanticism of the utmost importance at the time.

The teeming Seventies became the literary battleground of

the new romanticists and the neo-classicists, a conflict in which the latter prevailed. The decline of poetry in the Eighties and Nineties may be attributed to this temporary victory. The Seventies are full of paradoxes. The leading reporter of their activities, and of the later records of the century, was Edmund Clarence Stedman, who abhorred the new slang, but accepted Whitman almost in toto. He himself was addicted to classical themes and metres. His value to later generations is important, for he is the bridge between former anthologists and critics, like Griswold, Poe and Lowell, and those of the present: Jessie B. Rittenhouse, William Stanley Braithwaite, Harriet Monroe, Louis Untermeyer. Born in Hartford in 1833, Stedman moved to New York at the age of twenty-two, became a Wall Street stock broker and an intimate of the leading esthetes of the day, led by Bayard Taylor and Richard Henry Stoddard. To these respected names should be added those of Thomas Buchanan Read, George Henry Boker, Charles Godfrey Leland, Silas Weir Mitchell, John Godfrey Saxe. Virtually all appeared in *The Knickerbocker Gallery* of 1855 and some survived the last years of the century. Read, Boker, Leland and Mitchell were identified with the revival of letters in Philadelphia, and Taylor, the outstanding poetic figure of the group, was born in a little Quaker town in 1825. The others were born between 1822 and '33, and their first books appeared in the Forties and Fifties. Though they were the younger contemporaries of the New England group, a reactionary spirit possessed them. The pervading tone of their work was decidedly miniature. Most of these men enjoyed popularity far in excess of Whitman's. Saxe's first book came out five years before the Leaves and ran into twelve swift editions. He was known as the "witty poet," and rivaled Dr. Holmes in *vers-de-société*. After reading the Leaves and reflecting on their reception, one cannot laugh at these lines from "I'm Growing Old":

I see it in my changing taste,
I see it in my changing hair,
I see it in my growing waist,
I see it in my growing heir.

Read combined a love for painting with a love for letters and, fairly early, became identified with the Western metropolis, Cincinnati. But, like most of his contemporaries, he raced abroad and knelt at the knees of foreign traditions. He published several volumes of verse, and an English edition was greeted: "It is an addition to the permanent stock of poetry in the English language." Read was no more than a clever craftsman, more at home in Vesuvius Bay than the pioneer West. Boker also spent much time abroad, and is remembered for his heroic contributions to the heroic poetic drama, such as "Francesca da Rimini." These dramas seem antiquated now; yet any step toward a poetic theatre is one to be grateful for, in view of the profound glories of the classical ages. But an American poetic dramatist must seek his material nearer home and shape it to a language and rhythmical scheme based on life, not on books. Dr. Mitchell, an eminent neurologist, was the most distinguished of the Philadelphians, but his best work lay in the field of realistic fiction: "Hugh Wynne, Free Quaker." His poetry lacks the originality and minute study of life the novels and stories disclose. Leland, an offshoot of the Pennsylvania Dutch, was moved, like Lowell, by an interest in dialect. His famous "Hans Breitmann Ballads," aimed to amuse, are thin compared with "The Biglow Papers."

In Taylor, Stoddard, Stedman and the kindred Thomas Bailey Aldrich, we come to a more persuasive group, but one betraying most of all the respectable ideals of the time. Though Taylor died much earlier than the others, he was their nominal leader and the completest epitome of the public taste. Hence his great popularity. All four men were closely associated in New York, stimulated one another and rose to eminence in editorial or diplomatic capacities. They maintained their loyalty to beauty in little, down to their deaths. Like the youthful Tennyson, they had become drunken with Keats. His lordship developed beyond that first love; not so the American quartet. And their adoration of Shelley, and of the Oriental dreamer in Byron, added nothing to their work but further esthetic shadows. The youthful devotion of the group is typical of any young group, and is admirable so long as the devotees ultimately develop. To

these men, America was still as raw as Longfellow had found it; they went on worshiping and copying the beauty of other lands. They were moved by the war, and Taylor was chosen as the man to write the Centennial Ode of 1876. Taylor, an accomplished miniaturist, reduced his great theme to a round of pretty rhymes and artful measures. Whitman was the man for such an occasion, but popular choice fell to the Philadelphian whose enormous erudition, everlasting travels and romantic personality appealed to an adolescent race. On the editorial and diplomatic side, the group adopted the Bryant tradition. But Bryant was a concentrated being whose poetry sounds so spontaneous as to give the impression that the druid was born only yesterday and the later quartet long before him.

Taylor was literary editor of *The New York Tribune,* and the government sent him to Russia and Germany. Stoddard edited *The Aldine* and was literary editor of *The World* and of *The Mail and Express.* Stedman joined the staffs of *The Tribune* and *The World,* and became the editor of "A Victorian Anthology," "An American Anthology," and the accredited critic of the time. Aldrich edited *The Atlantic Monthly* from 1881 to '90. Other poets of the neo-classic tradition held further editorial positions. Josiah G. Holland projected *Scribner's Monthly*—later *The Century*—and was succeeded by the powerful Richard Watson Gilder, who edited *The Century* for nearly a whole generation. He was succeeded by his associate, the poet, Robert Underwood Johnson. The editorial destinies of the leading papers and periodicals were governed by poets, extremely conservative poets. There was no Bryant, no Poe, no Emerson, no Lowell, no Whitman, among them—each an editor in his day. They were supplanted by youthful exquisites and perfectionists who mirrored the wants of the race. Preservation was the handmaid of progress; it left culture to the men who had the most time for culture. The Republic was established and safe. It turned respectable, and resigned the reins of intellectual enlightenment to Tories in love with the sacred traditions of Britain and the Continent. They turned the country so far back on its past that it took a new spiritual revolution, a new romanticism, to

turn them out of office, just before the outbreak of the late World War.

Of the four New York poets and intimates, Richard Henry Stoddard is perhaps the most appealing. Like Whitman, he had to earn his own way, and therefore touched life more intimately than his fellows. Educated in New York public schools, he spent many years in iron foundries and studied literature as best he could. Here the resemblance to Walt ceases. Thanks to Taylor's friendship, Stoddard managed to devote himself more closely to letters, but poor health and the economic concerns of marriage forced him back into commerce. Through Hawthorne, he obtained a post in the New York Custom House, a post he labored at for seventeen years. His various editorial positions dovetailed or followed his commercial duties. Stoddard was almost as prolific as Taylor. He published a half dozen volumes of verse, and a collected edition in 1880; and compiled several anthologies, mostly concerned with English poetry. He also edited the "Bric-a-Brac" series, in ten volumes. Turning to his poetry, one finds a hint of his philosophy in the following:

> Birds are singing round my window,
> Tunes the sweetest ever heard,
> And I hang my cage there daily,
> But I never catch a bird.

Nor is the speech of this tragedy couched in his native tongue. Clichés and trite conventions abound in Stoddard's melodies, and his more ambitious pieces betray the drugging influence of Keats and Shelley. "The Witch's Whelp," one of his best poems, is marred by an overstrained effort to encompass the poetical at any cost. The celebrated "Ode To Lincoln" has a jerky rhythm not in keeping with the dirge the poet obviously intended to compose. Lincoln added more fame to poets than poets added to his fame. One turns from Stoddard to the finer records of Lowell and Whitman, and of the later poets, Markham, Robinson, Sandburg, Lindsay, Fletcher. There are genuine passages in Stoddard's Ode—notably those in which the silent, sorrowing race is described—

No house too poor to show
The nation's badge of woe.

Like Whitman, Stoddard came out of the people; but when it came to literature, except for occasional lines, he deserted his race for the safer, saner models of English classicism, diluted to the taste of the times.

Bayard Taylor was probably the most industrious writer of the whole Nineteenth Century. At seven, he began writing poems, and at sixteen appeared in *The Saturday Evening Post*. Three years later, his first book came out, and he undertook his first trip abroad. He tramped about Europe for two years, returned to New York, became literary editor of *The Tribune* and then pursued the California gold-rush. A little later, he returned to Europe and, never content with any one place, moved on to the Orient. Back and forth he roved between his native and foreign lands, and a small host of poetry books, travel pictures, novels, translations (including Goethe's Faust), were literally dashed off between his energetic journeys. Of poetry alone, he issued about twelve volumes. In 1878, while minister to Germany, he died at the age of fifty-three. Of his enormous poetic output, what remains? A few romantic lyrics about anything outside a potent contact with his manifold experience. A more lamentable record can scarcely be imagined in retrospect. Though he graced the American tongue with lyrical excursions into exotic lands—vide the popular "Bedouin Song" —Taylor must have beheld Africa, Egypt, China and Japan with the eyes and heart of a tourist.

Daughter of Egypt, veil thine eyes!
I cannot bear their fire;
Nor will I touch with sacrifice
Those altars of desire.

Here is the eternal exemplar of the native nomad who spends his vacations abroad, mostly in comfortable hotels, rushes back to the home about which he knows even less than he does of Europe, and rushes abroad again for some further impressions of the past and as much of the present as he can stomach without growing

too bohemian. Even when Taylor touches native themes, as in the "National Ode" or "The Quaker Widow," his language is literary, derivative or sentimental. Though he was a man of rare personal character, popular with distinguished men, as well as with the public, he left too little of himself in his poetry for a better judgment of his claim on posterity.

Thomas Bailey Aldrich was the most admired of the poets after Stoddard and Taylor. Born in Portsmouth, N. H., he spent his most impressionable years in New Orleans and New York. After the war, he was called to Boston to edit *Every Saturday* and later, *The Atlantic*, and, behind his home on Beacon Street, became a true Brahmin. His career illustrates a struggle between New York Bohemianism and Boston Brahminism. Dr. Holmes himself took young Aldrich in hand: "Your tendency to vanilla-flavored adjectives and patchouli-scented participles stifles your strength in cloying euphemisms." At twenty-two, Aldrich issued "The Course Of True Love Never Did Run Smooth," dedicated to Stoddard—"under whose fingers this story would have blossomed into true Arabian roses." Quite a number of other volumes followed, redolent of Longfellow, of Keats and Shelley, and of the Orient Aldrich visited in his dreams. The poems about Arabs, Turks, Sultans, Sultanas and so on, abound in sensuous images daintily transplanted. In one of his intimate poems, Aldrich refers to a Cromwellian forefather who wedded a Spanish or Frenchwoman who "led her Round-head lord a dance!"

> In me these two have met again;
> To each my nature owes a part:
> To one, the cool and reasoning brain;
> To one, the quick, unreasoning heart.

With his settlement in Boston, the brain took hold of the heart, and, in the revised and collected editions of his poems, the neoclassic drove out most of the romantic. Of his vast quantity of earlier poems, only thirty-three were permitted to remain. He strove more and more for perfection of form, shuddered at the *Sturm und Drang* of his period, and predicted that a man

who wrote about "the fall of a girl's eyelash" would leave "our shrill didactic singers high and dry on the sands of time." The war barely touched him, and for democracy and the underdog he voiced his dreads and doubts. None the less, his classical poems, especially in the sonnet form, are an improvement over the patchouli poems. Percy H. Boynton refers to their "fine simplicity; but it is the simplicity of an accomplished woman of the world rather than of a village maid." Even in the admired sonnet, "Enamored Architect Of Airy Rhyme"—"They fail, and they alone, who have not striven"—one greets not an art for art's sake, so much as a technique for technique's. There is too much reference in Aldrich and his friends to the poet and his art. It smacks of studio discussions. Stedman referred to him as "the most pointed and exquisite of our craftsmen . . . and a forecast of the present technical advance." Such advances are always welcome in a crude, groping land, providing they are employed on the substances of life and of experience, and not on second-hand culture and vicarious adventures. Such accomplished sonnets as "Reminiscence" and "Outward Bound" yearn for "a Nubian girl, more sweet than Khoorja musk," and "gaunt hulks of Norway, ships of red Ceylon and Ionian isles." No wonder Aldrich declared he would have rejected Kipling's "Recessional" had it been sent to *The Atlantic,* and that he considered the Zolaistic movement a "miasmic breath blown from the slums." In relation to his race and time, Aldrich was the apogee of Whitman. Yet the Brahmin was a darling of the people and Walt its most prominent outcast.

Edmund Clarence Stedman, a dilettante and critic to whom we owe more than we acknowledge, was a devout champion of poetry and superior to Rufus Griswold in catholicity. Stedman erred on the side of kindness, but his judgments were often keen and valuable. There is a tendency to sneer at his stock brokerage and his poem, "Pan In Wall Street." But he pursued business against his will, faced ruin several times and undermined his health on the market. Living a double life of business by day and poetry by night, he produced a staggering amount of literary work. Though he was shocked by the slang of his time and

devoted himself to classical forms, Stedman responded to problems of the race. Aldrich found a mentor in Holmes. Stedman found his in Lowell. In answer to the acclaim paid to the young poet's "Alcetryon," Lowell wrote: "I don't believe in these modern antiques—no, not in Landor, not in Swinburne, not in any of 'em. . . . It is like writing Latin verses—the material you work in is dead." On reflection, Stedman agreed with Lowell: "A new land calls for new song." Aside, however, from such poems as "Wanted A Man" and "Ossawatomie Brown," Stedman was a charming conservative addicted, like his fellows, to sentimental replicas of foreign cultures. He gave the latter part of his life to the huge compilations for which he is best remembered. He did not measure up to Poe and Lowell as a critic, but such an essay as the one in praise of Whitman is of value for certain demonstrated faults in advance of the free verse movement. After praising Whitman, the man seen through the poet, Stedman declares: "Unrhymed verse, the easiest to write, is the hardest to excel in, and no measure for a bardling. . . . Yet the few who have ventured to follow him have produced little that has not seemed like parody, or unpleasantly grotesque. It may be that his mode is suited to himself alone, and not to the future poets of These States." The critic then turns to old forms handled anew. "I suspect that the old forms, in endless combinations, will return as long as new poets arise with the old abiding sense of time and sound. The greatest poet is many-sided, and will hold himself slavishly to no one thing for the sake of difference. He is a poet, too, in spite of measure and material, while, as to manner, the style is the man." Turning back to Whitman, he adds: "He is far more original in his style proper than in his metrical inventions." In view of the classical ideals of Stedman and his group, these are shrewd observations. The group was surpassed in a fresh handling of old forms by poets of the next generation. The younger men outdistanced the older because of their deeper concern with life and because they inherited richer poetic gifts.

Stedman, like Griswold and Poe before him, was gallant to the ladies; his anthology and articles quote and pay tribute to

many. Though Emily Dickinson is represented in the anthology, there is no word about her in "Poets Of America"—a strange omission. While Stedman admits that none of the fair singers are comparable with Mrs. Browning, he claims an advance over their predecessors—"they know more than of old, their thought is deeper, their feeling more healthy. The morale of their verse is always elevating; in other respects it fluently adapts itself to the conventions of the day." Turning to the "sweet-voiced singers," one finds his kind summary true. Miss Larcom, Mrs. Stoddard, Mrs. Spofford, Mrs. Field, Mrs. Thaxter, Mrs. Dodge, Mrs. Moulton—the list is wellnigh endless and the names quite indistinguishable. As a group, the women of a later generation, of the World War and after, are hardier, more varied and original. The ladies of the Civil War, of the Seventies, Eighties and Nineties, produced innumerable volumes. But like their brethren, they were enamored of conventional themes conventionally molded. Any one of the pleasant lyrics about Nature, love, children and the home might have been written by any one of the women. Later in the century, better poets arrived: Emma Lazarus, Ina Coolbrith, Edith M. Thomas, Louise Imogen Guiney, Lizette Woodworth Reese, Anna Hempstead Branch. The last five, two of whom are still living, belong to a later chapter.

Emma Lazarus, the first and one of the most distinguished of Jewish poets, was born in New York in 1849 and died there in 1887. She began writing at fourteen; her first volume of poems and translations appeared four years after. Late in her comparatively short life, stirred by the persecution of her race in Russia, she devoted herself to impassioned propaganda. Her work is composed of poems on classical themes and poems on the Hebrews. Her sonnet on the Venus of the Louvre combines the two. At the feet of the "foam-born mother of Love," she beholds

> . . . a pale, death-stricken Jew,
> Her life adorer, sobbed farewell to love.
> Here *Heine* wept! Here still he weeps anew,
> Nor ever shall his shadow lift or move,

While mourns one ardent heart, one poet-brain,
For vanished Hellas and Hebraic pain.

"The Banner Of The Jew" calls on the race to respect and revive the glories of Israel, and to lift again "Moses' law and David's lyre." Emma Lazarus was one of the first cultural offshoots of the Continental emigration to America which developed a more polygot nation and a more varied literature.

The other men of the period may be divided into four groups: Neo-classicism: Richard Watson Gilder, John Boyle O'Reilly, Lloyd Mifflin and John Vance Cheney; Mid-Westerners: Eugene Field and James Whitcomb Riley; New Yorkers: the Carryls and Henry Cuyler Bunner; and Southerners: Samuel Minturn Peck, Irwin Russell, Joel Chandler Harris, Paul Lawrence Dunbar, Father Tabb and Madison Cawein. Gilder was a better editor and humanitarian than poet. He issued quite a few volumes and a collected edition in 1908. Gilder overworked his accomplished muse on such themes as "beauty," "music" and "art." Even his religious poems, usually his best work, reduce an ardent emotion to a conventional aim and speech. Poetry borders on poetastry in "The Poet's Secret," "A Poet's Question," "Music At Twilight" "Music In Moonlight," "The Poet's Sleep." O'Reilly was born in Ireland and enjoyed a bold young manhood as an Irish rebel. Then he settled in Boston. Though his art chastened, the Hub did not quite subdue his Celtic fancy. "The red rose whispers of passion, and the white rose breathes of love," has saved O'Reilly from a Puritan grave. Mifflin was born in Columbia, Pa., and died there only seven years ago. The most rhetorical poet of his era, he drove his main energies into the sonnet, a form he weighed down with an overwhelming grandiosity. Even a milkweed is endowed with the grand manner. Classical allusions abound in other sonnets: "the Heliconian springs," "Empyrean infinite," "I lay on Delos of the Cyclades." The poems have a regal orotundity. "The Sovereigns," in which "The Poet is the only potentate," is typical of Mifflin's virtues and vices. Cheney was a kind of belated moralist à la Longfellow. "The Happiest Heart," a twelve-line lyric, is a jocund

parade of perfect banalities. Given one line, one can almost anticipate the next:

> The rust will find the sword of fame,
> The dust will hide the crown;
> Ay, none shall nail so high his name
> Time will not tear it down.

Toward the close of the century, Markham's "Man With The Hoe" appeared. Far from winning a unanimous response from the American heart, it aroused demands for a retort. A prize, offered for a poem in refutation, was carried off by Cheney with a trite succession of couplets in which the worker was assured that he is

> Tall as his toil. Nor does he bow unblest:
> Labor he has, and rest.

Markham's poem ushered in a new century; Cheney's clung to the old.

Meanwhile, the Middle-West gave birth to two poets who carried on the school of sentiment and humor begun by Harte, Hay and Will Carleton: the Indianian Riley and the Missourian Field. Both used newspaper columns for their national appeal. Field's "Sharps And Flats" in *The Chicago Daily News* became the standard for such later colyumists as B. L. T., F. P. A., Don Marquis. Riley was the poet of cheerful sentiment easily digested and of rural humor easily laughed at. He won an enormous audience time has not diminished. Riley was a city-bred lad who parodied country people. His fourteen volumes were forerunners of what Louis Untermeyer calls the "A Smile A Day variety and the syndicated syrup of Edgar A. Guest." The versification is clever; the jingling rhythms and rhymes are easy to memorize; the "old-homestead" audience Riley courted may be found in the couplet:

> What We want, as I sense it, in the line
> O' poetry is sumpin' Yours and Mine.

In this he served an ideal humorously akin to Whitman's. But Riley was a better reader of the "hearts of his countrymen."

The scholarly Eugene Field was made over by the demands of a large city newspaper with a standardized audience. An indirect descendant of the New York "Croakers," Field wrote similar parodies on the immortal Horace—still the source of the average colyumist. And, like his descendants, he was also indebted to Lewis Carroll's Alice, and to the nonsense verses of Calverley and Lear. To these charms, Field added a love for children: "Wynken, Blynken And Nod," "Little Boy Blue." The neighborly poem, "Our Two Opinions," with its refrain,

> He havin' *his* opinyin uv *me*,
> 'Nd *I* havin' my opinyin uv *him*—

is Field at his best, as are the Horatian poems, "Echoes From The Sabine Farm." Newspapers which employ scholars to entertain the public deserve our gratitude.

Closely allied to the early New York wits, to Field and the colyumists, and finally to Dorothy Parker and Samuel Hoffenstein, are the lovers of spohisticated fooling: the Carryls and Bunner. Such poets are usually noted for an air of knowing cynicism couched in the lightest verse. They are a happy antidote against hours of solemnity. Charles Edward Carryl had a gift for rollicking ballads, but his son, Guy Wetmore, in his absurd parodies of Æsop, Mother Goose and the Brothers Grimm, outvied his father and the whole tribe of American nonsense writers. "Fables For The Frivolous," "Mother Goose For Grownups" and "Grimm Tales Made Gay" appeared in rapid succession. Young Carryl had a gift for rhyming impossible polysyllables and for striking off egregious puns with an air of mock heroics. "The Sycophantic Fox And The Gullible Raven" is delicious burlesque:

> "Sweet fowl," he said, "I understand
> You're more than merely natty,
> I hear you sing to beat the band
> And Adelina Patti.
> Pray render with your liquid tongue
> A bit from 'Götterdämmerung.'"

The raven complies with the Jewel Song from Faust, and the coveted cheese, in accordance with Newton's gravitation, falls

from the bird to the fox. Bunner, like the Carryls, was a product of the "Yellow Book" of Wilde and the Naughty Nineties. Like his English confreres, he excelled in the light French forms, already popular in America. For the last twenty years of his life, Bunner ruled the destinies of the then delightful weekly, *Puck*. His most absurd parody is the one on Joaquin Miller: "Shake, Mulleary And Go-ethe." The unfortunate Miller had once rhymed the last name with "teeth." Bunner seized the mishap and wrote a ballad on the three favorite busts, "all second-hand," gracing the top of his bookcase. Shakespeare was relieved of a syllable and Molière twisted to Mulleary.

While the Southern poets just after the Civil War were inferior to Poe, Timrod and Lanier, they have considerable interest. In Russell, Dunbar, Tabb and Cawein, four names were added to American poetry. Peck indulged a continuation of sentimental phases of the South: "Rings And Loveknots," "Rhymes And Roses," "Fair Women Of To-day." Harris, of Uncle Remus fame, and the novelist, Thomas Nelson Page, wrote negro dialect poems not to be compared with Irwin Russell's pioneer effort. In the loss of Russell at twenty-six, the South suffered a characteristic blow. Had he lived longer and taken his art more seriously, he might have become the Southern Burns. Though Burns and old English ballads gave him models for his verse, Russell found his immediate inspiration among the darkies. While the flute was Lanier's constant companion, the banjo accompanied Russell's vagabondage. In his ballad, "De Fust Banjo," he concludes: "Fur whar you finds de nigger—dar's de banjo an' de' possum!" As the author of Uncle Remus declared: "The dialect is not always the best—it is often carelessly written—but the negro is there, the old-fashioned, unadulterated negro." So is his master, before and after the war, in a vivid contrast drawn by an old freed slave:

I only has to shet my eyes, an' den it seems to me
I sees him right afore me now, jes' like he use' to be,
A-settin' on de gal'ry, lookin' awful big an' wise,
Wid little niggers fannin' him to keep away de flies. . . .

Well, times is changed. De war it come an' sot de niggers free,
An' now ol' Mahsr John ain't hardly wuf as much as me;

He had to pay his debts, an' so his lan' is mos'ly gone—
An' I declar' I's sorry fur my pore ol' Mahsr John.

The small volume by which Russell is remembered reveals the plantation negro's simplicity, superstition, guile, exaggerated religion and humor. For downright philosophic drollery, no couplet in American letters excels the one in which a negro chants, excusing himself to the Lord for dancing on Holy Night:

Remember, Mahsr,—min' dis now—de sinfulness ob sin
Is 'pendin 'pon de sperrit what we goes an' does it in.

Such lines come out of our richest folk lore: the negro spiritual. It was not until recently that negroes themselves made use of this marvelous treasury. The present negro renascence in poetry is partly an outcome of the spiritual.

Dunbar, another Southerner who died fairly early, was not the first of negro poets. One goes back to Phyllis Wheatley, the African girl who was brought to Boston in 1761 and adopted by the merchant, John Wheatley. At twenty-two, Phyllis, who had made remarkable progress, addressed a poem to General Washington, and received a gracious panegyric in return. Trained in the classics, she wrote perfect heroic couplets on moral and religious themes, and held her own with the poets of the Revolutionary era. In Dunbar, the negroes gave birth to another poet more influenced by the white race than his own. His poems are smoother than Russell's, but the white man saw deeper into the darkies. Dunbar's poems are tinged with sentimentality; likewise the titles of his books: "Lyrics Of The Hearthside," "Lyrics Of Love And Laughter," "Lyrics Of Sunshine And Shadow." "Lyrics Of Lowly Life," his first book, is more original. Here Dunbar made skillful use of the negro's fondness for refrains. But one cannot overcome the impression that the verses are too sophisticated; that Dunbar had not learned enough from his own race. His books still enjoy the widest vogue.

In John Banister Tabb, Virginia gave birth to an exquisite miniaturist. Father Tabb was born in 1845, ordained in '84

and issued his first book ten years later. Several other volumes followed, but a collected edition did not appear until the year after his death—1928. His mastery of tiny forms, especially the quatrain, tempts a comparison with the later Imagists. Next to Emily Dickinson's, the quatrains are pale and subdued. Emily's ecstasy burst the bonds of the form; Tabb's are the result of resignation, of thought, of the intellect. But the thought gives wings to overtones. There are more than four lines in the quatrain, "Adrift":

> The calm horizon circles only me,
> The centre of its measureless embrace,—
> A bubble on the bosom of the sea,
> Itself a bubble in the bound of space.

The cameos have an epigrammatic precision. A blending of vowels and consonants conveys the thought and afterthought. The longer poems, only slightly longer, are an extension of the epigrammatic. "Clover" opens with a mystic appeal to the "little masters," and hopes that their silence will solve for the priest "this your threefold mystery." Strolling his garden as "the nun of Amherst" strolled hers, Tabb wrote many flower poems. Often they breathe a simple, devout Catholic air, and Nature is wooed through Catholicism.

> The waves forever move;
> The hills forever rest:
> Yet each the heavens approve,
> And Love alike hath blessed
> A Martha's household care,
> A Mary's cloistered prayer.

If there had to be a reversion to classicism, better Father Tabb's than the imitative echoes of Stoddard, Taylor, Aldrich and Gilder. Amid his Catholicism, the priest observed things nearest at hand and strung his beads to the best of his delicate vision. And the restraints he placed upon the expression of his faith, his refusal to exploit the members of the Trinity, were traits of an artist in religion, as well as in poetry.

Madison Cawein, named by his admirers, the Keats of Ken-

tucky, was extraordinarily prolific. He issued more than twenty individual titles, and a collected edition of five stout volumes. If sheer industry is the mark of genius, Cawein was a genius. Notwithstanding his concern with the native soil, an overwhelming bookishness drove him into fulsome rhetoric and a fatal fondness for adjectives. Nearly deaf to the inner music of metrics, he sacrificed meanings to an inviolate rhyme, and often filled in a line mechanically. "The Creek Road," containing matter for a beautiful Kentucky sonnet, is marred by awkward rhymes and a stressing of insignificant syllables. This mathematical measuring of quantity, and a lack of feeling for the sensuous blending of lines, was Cawein's besetting sin. The poet's interest in Nature and humanity is incontestable. His poems on the Ku Klux Klan, on lynching, on feuds, are invaluable records of the soil. But the breathless pace of "The Man Hunt" is interrupted, not by losing sight of the quarry, but by losing a natural sequence of sounds in the dashing couplets. When a sequence is achieved, the lines are thrillingly clear:

> A shout; a curse; and a face aghast,
> And the human quarry is laired at last. . .
>
> A rope, a prayer, and an oak-tree near.
> And a score of hands to swing him clear.
>
> A grim black thing for the setting sun
> And the moon and the stars to look upon.

Cinematographic speed and clarity are the exception rather than the rule. And Cawein's feeling for humanity was rarer than his wistful longing for a world peopled with the fauns and fauna of sentimental literature. He had a still more wistful yearning for literary immortality:

> My soul would sing of beauty and myth
> In a rhyme and a metre that none before
> Have sung in their love, or dreamed in their lore,
> And the world would be richer one poet the more.

Here is that contemporary concern with an art for art's sake—the desire without the power of fulfillment. Given the long,

solid traditions of European lands, the reaction against experiment might have been a natural step. But only a few traditions had yet found time to implant themselves in American soil. Cawein, like the Taylors and Aldriches, suffered in consequence. Most of their work has an artificial tinge, rather than an artistic tone. Though Cawein was born at the close of the Civil War and died near the outbreak of the World War, his work has an old-fashioned, pseudo-Keatsian air. Not even his Kentucky lyrics completely escape a plagiaristic charge.

The year 1900 cut short two Americans who might have reached greater heights: Richard Hovey in his thirty-sixth year, Stephen Crane in his twenty-ninth. These men were instinct with the radical spirit of Whitman. The early work of Hovey, and Crane's poems, stories and "The Red Badge Of Courage," were far removed from what Hovey dubbed, the "elegant canzonettas" written "for the delectation of the *dilettanti.*" The exuberant Hovey was conscious, a little too conscious, of an outdoor mission "to lay open to the world the heart of man—all its heights and depths, all its glooms and glories." There is something glib in this proposal, and something glib in the dancing vitality of the "Songs Of Vagabondia," in which the Canadian poet, Bliss Carman, collaborated. Hovey could force even a sonnet to dance—witness "Love In The Winds." In the celebrated "Stein Song" and such poems as "Dartmouth Winter-Song," "Comrades," "At The Crossroad," wine, fellowship and Bohemia are glorified as never before in America. But the revolt of Hovey and Carman against the indoor, parlor poets, led them, not back to Nature, but to "Art and Letters, Music and Wine, Myrtle and Wanda." Hovey shouts, "Off with the fetters that chafe and restrain," only to lead our new freedom to Golconda and the Indies. The rhythm is irresistible, the language no better than a comic operetta libretto.

Hovey had a more serious side and, had he lived long enough, might have become a leading force in the later renascence. In 1898, people were stirred by the nation's intervention for Cuban independence. While some poets viewed this move as an act in the direction of American imperialism, Hovey agreed with

those defenders who described it as our "manifest destiny," based upon a purely paternal interest in the helpless island. In his lyric, "Unmanifest Destiny," Hovey ascribed our history and development to God on high—a claim similar to the one made by leaders who thrust European nations into the late World War. We shall see how differently a finer, deeper poet, William Vaughn Moody, reacted toward the annexation of the Philippines.

It is curious that Hovey's serious strain matured, not along outdoor or American lines, but along the archaic traditions of Arthurian legends classically modeled. The ardent poet planned a cycle of nine poetic dramas, only four of which were completed. Some critics of the time, even in England, preferred them to Tennyson's "Idyls Of The King." Hovey completed "The Quest Of Merlin," "The Marriage Of Guinevere," "The Birth of Galahad" and "Taliesin, A Masque." "Taliesin," generally considered the best, appeared just before his death. The choruses and lyrics show how far Hovey had mastered the technical problems of his art. But the rejection of life and the ways of men harks back to the ivory tower of the poet's once scorned dilettanti. Two poets, born five years after Hovey, were to learn a good deal from him and to surpass him in his own field: Moody and Robinson. Hovey has come down to us through these poets, and through the historic interest he holds for students of the poetic drama. The Arthurian plays have fine theatrical, as well as poetic, moments. Blank verse dialogues, with lyric interludes, and prose passages for buffoons and watchmen, revert to the methods of the Elizabethan stage. But the old plays are infinitely more modern than Hovey's. Despite his skill as a poet and dramatist, his preoccupation with a medieval theme and his attempt to revive the language and trappings of the time were foredoomed to failure. His attempt to endow the plays with modern analogies has the air of endowing museum pieces with life. He should have left the knights and ladies on their pedestals and devoted his energies to the outdoors and the people he had once chosen as his mission.

Stephen Crane, another prolific American, was a true original. At twenty-two, in "The Red Badge Of Courage," he composed a remarkable study of the psychology of soldiers under fire, though he had not yet witnessed a battlefield. The same intensity pervades his short stories—the best of their kind in American literature. The youthful genius also issued two small volumes of verse: "The Black Riders" and "War Is Kind." These pieces have an historical, rather than an intrinsic interest as poetry. In his nervous, intuitive fashion, Crane was a forerunner of the Imagist group which flourished during the World War. Like theirs, his fables are concise, elliptical, unrhymed. But the Imagists surpassed him on the sensuous side, and their range of interests was broader. H. G. Wells hailed Crane as "the first expression of the opening mind of a new period . . . a record of intensity beyond all precedent." This intensity is missing from the poems. They have more value as microcosmic philosophy, and not much value there. One reads and admires them again—as unconscious forerunners of Imagism. The sources of the Imagists lay, not in Crane, but in French *vers libre* and the fragments of Sappho. Crane, a son of the scientific age, felt the tragic and absurd littleness of man in the cosmos. Most of his poems deal with this phase of humanity. Technically, they are closer to divided prose than free verse. They lack inevitability of form. One of the most appealing fragments is called "The Heart." It is a little like Baudelaire:

> In the desert
> I saw a creature, naked, bestial,
> Who, squatting upon the ground,
> Held his heart in his hands
> And ate of it.
> I said, "Is it good, friend?"
> "It is bitter—bitter," he answered;
> "But I like it
> "Because it is bitter,
> "And because it is my heart."

In the midst of so many optimistic poets and prosemen, Crane was an early disillusionist. In this he resembled Ambrose Bierce.

Bierce and Crane, like Poe before them, were fascinated by evil. Faith in the all-pervading good on earth and in heaven had had a long reign: from Emerson and Longfellow to Whitman. The time had arrived for some equally healthy skepticism and pessimism, a renewed concern with the darker phases of human nature, an attempted evaluation of humanity in the round.

XVII

ON THE EVE OF ANOTHER RENASCENCE

I strive to probe to other hearts, and find
I do but fret the phantoms of mine own . . .
Richard Burton.

AS we near the national renascence in poetry, we search the declining years of the older century for men and women who began their careers while Bryant was still alive, and whose careers extend to the present day. Again one is impressed with the longevity of so many poets, mostly of New England stock, and with the comparative youthfulness of American poetry. When Bryant died in 1878, about a dozen still living poets were over twenty years old. Pursuing dates a little farther, two years stand out: 1852, which brought Edwin Markham, Henry Van Dyke, Charles Erskine Scott Wood; and 1869, which brought William Vaughn Moody, George Sterling, Edwin Arlington Robinson, Edgar Lee Masters. Between these two groups, we find additional groups of varied interest—names too numerous for full mention. Nor is it necessary to study their work in chronological order. It is better to follow an esthetic order, to learn what these men and women added to American poetry, and what, if any, is their relation to the present. Before leaving Bryant's death-year, one can round out the perspective by noting that Amy Lowell was four at the time, Robert Frost three and Carl Sandburg about to be born. These three poets, along with Robinson and Masters, Ezra Pound and the Imagists, form the advance-guard of the national renascence. I propose to study the work of their predecessors, and to argue that quite a few kept the art of poetry alive during the transition between the Civil War and the World War, and quite a few share in the renascence which some of us rashly claim as the sole product of

our own generation. Those of us who ignore the best of these forerunners, fail to see the workings of cause and effect in our life and letters, and are therefore blind to the inner significance of the renascence itself. That birth or re-birth was not the result of divine or human accident, but the natural outgrowth of earlier marches and movements.

Studying the immediate predecessors according to poetic, rather than factual data, one finds that most remained loyal to moods and modes of traditional England or New England. The pathfinders were largely outnumbered. But the conservative element wrote original things inside the classic norm: a decided advance over the imitative Taylors and Gilders of the earlier reaction. Poets who marked time with Taylor and Gilder are epitomized in Robert Underwood Johnson. At the head of a book dedicated to Gilder, Gilder's successor wrote:

> Hardy gorse, that all year long
> Blooms upon the English moor,
> Let me see thee at the door
> Of this little book of song.

The verse of Van Dyke, George Edward Woodberry, Samuel Loveman, Frank Dempster Sherman, Clinton Scollard, and of Florence Earle Coates, Alice Brown, Katherine Lee Bates, Helen Gray Cone, belongs to similar categories. Woodberry and Miss Brown distinguished themselves in other fields, the former in scholarly books of vital interest down to this day, the latter in New England fiction. Sherman had a charming gift for light lyrics and *vers-de-société*. Scollard is the most prolific poet in the whole of American poetry. He has issued over forty volumes correctly conceived and expressed. Loveman is remembered for the lilting English lyric,

> It isn't raining rain to me,
> It's raining daffodils.

Miss Coates and Miss Bates have a gift for genial sentiment. Miss Cone has a sturdier feeling for realities. In contrast to her, we turn to the leader of fireside sentiment and household editions: the popular Ella Wheeler Wilcox. Her "Poems Of Pas-

sion" have been devoured by millions of passionless readers and by readers whose hearts beat to the facile optimism of

> Laugh, and the world laughs with you;
> Weep, and you weep alone.

The more distinguished singers in English metres are Ina Coolbrith, Edith M. Thomas, Charlotte Perkins Stetson Gilman, Louise Imogen Guiney, Lizette Woodworth Reese, Anna Hempstead Branch, and Richard Burton, Bliss Carman, George Santayana, George Sterling. This formidable group requires individual attention. To these must be added the variant groups: the Southern poets, John Bennett, Beatrice Ravenel and Cale Young Rice, the Middle-Westerners, Hamlin Garland, Edwin Ford Piper and William Vaughn Moody, and the social radicals, Edwin Markham and Charles Erskine Scott Wood. There are also the humorists, Oliver Herford, T. A. Daly and Bert Leston Taylor. If one calls the group of women the most potent to arrive on the American scene, one does so without subscribing to the mere gallantry of the Messrs. Poe, Griswold and Stedman. This group, along with such younger poets as Edna St. Vincent Millay, H. D., Elinor Wylie, Marianne Moore and others (a still more formidable group), attest to the growing power of the American woman in poetry. In segregating them, one must remember they are strictly poets. It is only in deference to critical convenience, one studies them in feminine groups.

Ina Donna Coolbrith was born in the city of Lincoln and Lindsay, Springfield, Ill., but is identified with the California of her adoption. Though much of her work is concerned with the Golden State and she was chosen its Poet Laureate, her muse really adheres to English lyrism and to Yankee via Middle-Western Puritanism. Compared with the poetry of Miller or Sill, her work sounds foreign to California. Edith Matilda Thomas, a native of Ohio, had a grave talent for classical songs and sonnets with a symbolical overtone. Another of the many women who excelled in craftsmanship, rather than poetry, she had a larger interest in verse than in life. She was a constant contributor to standard magazines and published about a dozen

volumes. In Miss Guiney, Mrs. Gilman, Miss Reese and Miss Branch, we come to stouter material. The reputation of the Boston poet, Miss Guiney, has increased since her lamented death in 1920. Though she devoted herself a little too consciously to art and let her muse indulge in rhetorical flights, she had vigor, personality and rhythm. "The Wild Ride," with its mystic cavalcade of Knights of the Grael, is characteristic. In "The Kings," we greet the recurring struggle of the Puritan spirit with fate and conscience, and the triumph of Will over the evil kings: Mind's Doubt, Bodily Pain, Grief and Vice. Miss Guiney's spirit was a recrudescence of the sombre Puritan set to the galloping measures of Cavalier poets. This stanza from "Sanctuary" is symptomatic of her exultation:

> High above hate I dwell:
> O storms! farewell.
> Though at my sill your daggered thunders play,
> Lawless and loud to-morrow as to-day,
> To me they sound more small
> Than a young fay's footfall:
> Soft and far-sunken, forty fathoms low
> In Long Ago,
> And winnowed into silence on that wind
> Which takes wars like a dust, and leaves but love behind.

If Miss Guiney was a conservative whose intensity burst the bonds of strict verse, Mrs. Gilman is an ardent poet who employs conventional metres with a view of attacking conservative minds. The Hartford poet began an early crusade in the fields of economics, sociology, labor and woman's rights, and is endeared to modern radicals for her poetic satires on the American bourgeoisie. She has only issued one volume, "In This Our World," but it is crowded with vital images, and shares with Markham's "Man With The Hoe," the distinction of opening the movement in behalf of industrial workers. The problem of Child Labor is summed up in two quatrains:

> No fledgling feeds the fatherbird,
> No chicken feeds the hen,
> No kitten mouses for the cat—
> This glory is for men.

We are the wisest, strongest race:
  Long may our praise be sung—
The only animal alive
  That lives upon its young!

An even finer lyric in this field, still more concise and biting, is Sarah N. Cleghorn's:

The golf links lie so near the mill
  That almost every day
The laboring children can look out
  And see the men at play.

Miss Cleghorn, a Virginian, is considerably younger than the Yankee feminist: her rebellious kinship to the latter may be found in "Portraits And Protests." Nothing could be more appropriate than Mrs. Gilman's symbolic attack, "The Conservative." Wandering among garden beds, she spies "a black and crimson butterfly all doleful and forlorn." This infant is wretched because his cozy caterpillar state is over and he is now afflicted with "flapping wing-things" that "hamper and deform." The poet dubs him an "ignominious idiot." He retorts, he does not want to fly, but to squirm.

I left my fool in red and black;
  The last I saw was this,—
The creature madly climbing back
  Into his chrysalis.

With Miss Reese and Miss Branch, we reach the two most important woman-poets just after Emily Dickinson. They belong to the English tradition, but the lyric spontaneity of Miss Reese and the imaginative power of Miss Branch reveal distinctive personalities. Miss Reese was born in Waverly, Md., and moved to Baltimore early in life. It has been her home ever since; she now shares the city of monuments with her young friend, H. L. Mencken. Her first book, "A Branch Of May," appeared over forty years ago. It was followed by "A Handful Of Lavender," "A Quiet Road," and, a few years ago, "Young Henrietta," and selected poems. Though her work was accepted by leading periodicals, her early volumes had no ex-

tended sale. Her clear, unassuming art has appealed to poets, rather than the public. The eager-eyed Stedman hailed her work as "artistic, natural, beautiful with the old-time atmosphere and associations, and at times rising to a noble classicism." This is acute criticism. Movements have come and gone since Miss Reese began singing. Her art grows more and more spontaneous, more and more accomplished, in her chosen field: an undisturbed garden of transplanted English things nurtured with grace and simplicity. It is a totally different place from Emily's wayward garden, and by no means so ecstatic and exciting. The Amherst nun belongs to the present generation, the Baltimore oriole to the past. As Untermeyer points out, Miss Reese is the true forerunner of "the direct songs" of Sara Teasdale and Edna Millay. Compared with the abundant Victorian sentimentalism of the late Nineteenth Century, her speech is realistic. And it is real because it is redolent of the bucolic soil of Maryland hills. Though her metres are English, her work belongs to that phase of the later renascence which employs old forms to express native experiences. For thirty years, Miss Reese taught English in the Western High School of Baltimore. She did not resign the old post until 1921. Two years later, alumni, teachers and pupils united in erecting a bronze replica of her famous sonnet, "Tears," and the poet was permitted to come upon the tablet unaware. Rumor has it that the doughty little woman gave way to her emotion. Popularity has not dimmed the reaches of the great little poem. It is one of the notable sonnets in the language.

"Spicewood," though not so well known, is an equally moving sonnet. Here, in the most natural human speech, country images are aroused by the spicewood of spring, "the first, the homeliest thing of all." The sestet achieves a surprising last-line cadence, in which a sudden, almost dissonant shift, blends the indoor with the outer, the human with the natural world. Miss Reese is the American poet of spring, a spring which has known no fall or winter in her case. In "Spring Ecstasy," the last line of the last quatrain strikes a poignant note descriptive of our shortest season:

The weather has gone mad with white;
The cloud, the highway touch.
White lilac is enough;
White thorn too much.

The gradual shortening of the lines is as effective as the words in sharpening the breathing. Human speech set to music is the salient form. Nothing is ever strained for the sake of tradition. The form is merely the means of expressing and holding the mood. "A Holiday" lifts commonplace prose to delicate alliteration and rhyme—rhymes that do not intrude, rhymes that are undercurrents. In search of "pastoral ways" and "the healing of the trees," the poet goes hiving for honey "against the time of snow." How subtly dramatic that final sibilant! Of the conscious side of artistry, and the value of restraint to the poet, the quatrain, "Reserve," declares:

Keep back the one word more,
Nor give of your whole store;
For, it may be, in Art's sole hour of need,
Lacking that word, you shall be poor indeed.

After the many wistful poems about poetry written by the Aldriches and Gilders, Miss Reese's are clean-cut and wise. In "To A Town Poet," one of her longest lyrics (her poems are rarely long), the thought in "Reserve" is developed. The attack on the town poet betrays a phase of Miss Reese's nature of which most people are unaware: her fighting propensities. She insists upon a "faith in the time, faith in our common blood," and that the poet "fret not for fame."

Let trick of words be past;
Strict with the thought, unfearful of the form,
So shall you find the way and hold it fast,
The world hear, at the last,
The horns of morning sound above the storm.

Here she joins hands with the confident resignation of Whitman. After the prosaic homilies, the poetic image emerges in the last line: the song beautifully carved. Miss Reese has the confidence of genius. She heard "the teasing throng" of an earlier day ap-

plaud the saccharine descendants of Longfellow, and saw a later day turn to the offspring of Whitman and the Imagists. Still she persists in her quiet faith in the things which led her from the start. She is a daughter of the deed she describes in the line: "But Fame upon a white deed loves to build." She is enamored of whiteness, of the purity that contains all values and removes excrescences. Her tribute to "A Puritan Lady" discloses notes of self-portraiture. In these days of a hasty, wholesale condemnation of our forefathers' creed, it is well to listen to a sturdy version of the tale. The Puritan lady is compact of wild Carthage, Rome and Sidon, and "stared to tears"

> Tall, golden Helen, wearying
> Behind the Trojan spears.

"Towered Antwerp" and "some hushed house in Oxford grass" knew her, "or lane in Salem town." Then follows a keen analysis of her many-sided character:

> Humble and high in one,
> Cool, certain, different,
> She lasts; scarce saint, yet half a child,
> As hard, as innocent.

No one has ever caught the child nature in clearer words than "hard" and "innocent."

> What grave, long afternoons,
> What caged airs round her blown,
> Stripped her of humor, left her bare
> As cloud, or wayside stone?
>
> Made her as clear a thing,
> In this slack world as plain
> As a white flower on a grave
> Or sleet sharp at a pane?

The everlasting adjective, pitfall of most poets, is handled with aptness and restraint. "Towered" Antwerp etches the whole city. "Caged" airs suggest the repressed Puritan. "Slack" world limns the surroundings against which the "plain" forefathers fought their early battles. And how effective the sudden entrance of the "white" flower and the inverted sharp sleet.

This is no attack or defense of the Puritan, but a musical portrait—the work of an artist.

Human beings along the road play their part among country things; and in some of the flower poems, notably the Mullein and "Wild Cherry" sonnets, a reference to love is made through simple symbols. The love poems gain sharp power through the reticence of the floral images. "Wild Cherry" is personified as the lonely girl who deserves many lovers.

> Why make your lodging here in this spent lane,
> Where but an old man, with his sheep each day,
> Twice through the forgotten grass goes by your way,
> Half sees you there, and not once looks again?

Here is the Imagistic method of conveying a meaning obliquely. "A Flower Of Mullein" is fully as poignant, and yet the language is perfectly natural, and the kinship of flower and woman merely intimated. The flower speaks, or the woman through the flower, to a man who prefers the different to the common. The sonnet delineates the diverse temperaments of the man and woman, and of the woman waiting for him to return after his wayward quest of exotic blooms is over. This is an Imagistic sonnet, thoroughly modern in its psychologic implications. It is never intellectual; the lexicon of psychoanalysts is absent; the speech is ordinary, and the image complete without human interpretation.

In her singing interest in country figures, Miss Reese resembles the earlier Whittier and Lowell, the later Robinson and Frost. Though the background of "Old Saul" is England, it is American as well—or international. This pitiful fellow lives near a white hawthorn bush in Tinges Lane. His remaining existence is summed up in three lines:

> To cobble for his bread;
> To mourn a tall son lost at sea;
> A daughter worse than dead.

He grudges his hawthorn to lovers "slipping through the dusk." "It was too white for any but the dead." He asks "two or three folks" to save the bloom for his grave. There is an added

resemblance to Wordsworth, pioneer in the return to Nature and the speech of country people. But the Lake poet could not resist an occasional windy moral. Whatever her shortcomings, Miss Reese is always an artist. Of her Christ poems, ever folk-like and never offensive in any loud assertions of faith, the most appealing are "A Christmas Folk-Song," "A Carol," "This Very Hour." Again the artist destroys didacticism. The quiet, unprejudiced tale is enough, as in "This Very Hour." A vision of the Master between two thieves is captured under a modern "village sky." Each villager plays his rôle in the reënacted drama: one is Pilate, one Andrew, another Caiaphas. "Peter stoops to his bulbs," while "James halts there to talk," and finally:

> Along some brambly wall,
> Where orange haw burns hot,
> His thirty coins held fast,
> Goes dark Iscariot.

Death has no terror for this woman. Though the thought is conventional, the form is Imagistic:

> What cloudy shapes do fleet
> Along the parchéd street;
> Clerks, bishops, kings go by—
> To-morrow so shall I!

Here the kinship is closer to Emily Dickinson. With the arrival of the Amherst and Maryland poets, American women began to vie with their poetic brethren: the swift succession of women poets stems back to the radical Emily or the conservative Lizette. There is no need to compare these two leaders, or their descendants. Each has individual values without which no national poetry is complete. And when one reads the latest poem of the latest young poet and compares it with some new poem by Miss Reese, one marvels at the gravity of the former and the growing youthfulness of the woman of seventy-two. Despairing of all categories, one accepts with silent cheer the poet in Lizette Woodworth Reese, and beheads such words as

conservative, classical, modern, radical. In the presence of poetry, definitions are unessential interlopers.

Anna Hempstead Branch, in some respects, is even more distinguished than Miss Reese, and *ipso facto* has had even less popularity. She is a poet's poet and the most profoundly mystic of Americans. The recent civil war between radical and conservative poets obscured her; now the storm is over and perspectives are visible, the work of Miss Branch rises serenely clear. The available facts concerning her are few. She was born in Connecticut, graduated from Smith College in 1897, and moved to New York, where her life has been devoted to settlement work and poetry. She has issued three volumes: "The Heart Of The Road," "The Shoes That Danced," "Rose Of The Wind." The mystical, lyrical and dramatic have produced a poet of unique power. One prefers her narratives to her poetic plays; but her training as a dramatist undoubtedly aided her in the unfolding of her masterpiece: "Nimrod." Anthologists have given the first place to her one famous poem, "The Monk In The Kitchen." It is a transmutation of the common to the holy, through the ministrations of the spirit of order:

> Order is a lovely thing;
> On disarray it lays its wing,
> Teaching simplicity to sing.

Trying to discover the hidden nature of things, the monk questions his kitchen utensils. Though they were made by man, he feels they respond to the breathing of "an inner Spirit," and determines to "spread abroad the beautiful cleanness of my God."

Miss Branch has written a number of moving lyrics, sometimes hampered by abstractions. Miss Reese, Miss Teasdale and Miss Millay are better lyrists. In the sphere which demands a concentrated effort of senses and spirit, heart and brain, driven along and controlled by the dramatic movement, Miss Branch stands alone. On the one hand, "Nimrod" refutes Poe's dictum that pure narrative does not exist; on the other, in these days of a revived interest in epic forms, "Nimrod" is superior to

Robinson's Arthurian legends, to the freer dramatic poems of the Californian Jeffers, to the recent Civil War epic, Stephen Benét's "John Brown's Body." Miss Rittenhouse considers "Nimrod" the outstanding imaginative poem in Twentieth Century American literature, and compares it with Francis Thompson's "The Hound Of Heaven." I am inclined to go farther and call it the greatest single narrative in the whole length of American poetry. Though it employs classical blank verse and goes back to Nimrod, Bathsheba and the rise and fall of Babel, it is modern, and modern without pointing a moral. The reader's imagination may scan present horizons and our pompous claims in the light of Nimrod's grandiose tragedy and, if he is bred in a place like New York, the most brazen of Babels, he can see ahead to the day when the mad island falls beside the kingly city the mighty hunter reared on the Hebraic sands of old.

"Nimrod" is a poem of about two thousand lines, divided into seven parts. Inside the austere demands of the classical verse, the movement is richly varied, thanks to the passion of the language and the skillful use of a gamut of shifting stresses. One may quibble now and then with a redundancy of images. And now and then, the poem, carried along on the wings of a cosmic inspiration, flies off into dizzy abstractions the human reader cannot follow. But the main body of the poem is firm, sustained, balanced. The poet has placed full stops at the close of each part. The next opens in another key, mood, movement. Her symphonic intuitions are admirable; her personality never intrudes. I recall my own dread in approaching the final part. I stopped, took breath and wondered whether the poet, a Yankee and a Christian mystic, could possibly resist drawing an American moral on the defeat of Nimrod by Jehovah. No New Englander had ever resisted such an opening, and here was the finest opening for driving home an obvious parallel. It was so easy to seize the pen and split the heart of the sentimental reader. But the poet holding this pen was no Longfellow, nor a Lowell, nor an Emerson. A thorough-going artist through the first six

parts, she remained thorough-going to the end. She had a story to tell and finished nothing else but the story.

The poem opens with a long, supple sentence characteristic of the broad movement of the entire narrative. Some of the swinging sentences will be fully as long as Lowell's, but rarely will the reader have to retrace his step in search of strayed subjects, blind predicates, circumlocuting parentheses. The three variations on the word, blood, are announced with an old Testamental dignity:

> One time, in Shinar, when the setting sun
> With all his thousand javelins, drove the day
> Before him and the myriad tribes of light
> Departed sullenly with bleeding feet,
> Great Nimrod, the strong huntsman of the Lord,
> Returning hot with bloodshed from the chase,
> Beheld great Babel, wrathful, beautiful,
> Burn like a blood-red cloud upon the plain.

Nimrod had built this huge metropolis "in the waste" for Bathsheba, the queen, and emblazoned the walls with mighty characters such as Adam must have spoken when he saw "Eve, in her whiteness," in the days of their innocence. Ambition had not yet reared bastions to heaven; God had not been challenged. Nor had any man on earth ever lied. Unhappily, like Eve before her, Bathsheba grows curious, and, reading Nimrod's wonderful hieroglyphs, finds one word missing, the Word of God, the secret which shall explain life and annihilate sorrow, fleshly affliction and death itself—"and we return into that Eden—which they tell us of—lost in the forests of the dawn!" In the entire poem, this early speech is the one long speech of the queen. For the rest, she is a comparatively silent reflection of the majestic, bragging king. One even sees her but rarely, and yet one can feel her presence throughout. Nimrod looms in the foreground and over the vast expanse; Bathsheba huddles among the shadows of his breast or at his feet. Her speech concludes:

> And thou shalt grow
> Ancient in years and beautiful with time.

> And I will bear thee harvests of strong males,
> And thou and all thy sons shall be as Kings.

The great hunter, filling his great lungs with pride, echoes the speech of the queen and suddenly calls: "Am I not Nimrod?" This chant is the key to his enormous self-confidence and still more enormous ambition. This chant will be the answer to all questions and doubts, to everything on earth and in heaven, to God Almighty Himself. It is impossible to convey, through mere analysis or choppy excerpts, the majesty of this ambition. "Nimrod" is built on the lines of the Greek Prometheus or the Miltonic Satan. And we take sides with him against Jehovah—as we do with Satan in "Paradise Lost." Consciously, Miss Branch, like the great Puritan poet, may have sided with God, but unconsciously, she makes our nerves and sinews respond to Nimrod. In the battle to come, we rise with him, fight behind him, fall and decline with him.

Nimrod calls for a feast to the Lord in the streets of Babel, and, letting Bathsheba and the people declare the greatness of Jehovah, mounts a high peak and lifts his voice to Him. Without a tinge of insipid modesty, he rehearses the building of Babel in the desert, assuring his Maker—"with a thousand tongues my walls proclaim Thee." He then requests, without further braggadocio, that God send an angel with the sacred Word so lacking on earth.

> I will turn
> My people's hearts to wisdom and we shall be
> Beautiful nations bourgeoning the plain . . .

Silence greets his prayer. Nimrod turns wroth, "and in his sullen heart defied Jehovah." Suddenly, the town is attacked by a "pale and spectral host" of archangels on "shadowy stallions." Nimrod turns on the cohorts and, pushing his shoulder against the mountain, attacks them with "monstrous cavalcades" of bowlders.

> Enraged, enraptured, pale, with bow upraised
> Great Nimrod shot his arrow at the gods.
> And lo, the heavenly onslaught flamed away.

Nimrod has only won a spectral battle from the sly God, but this is enough to set his human fancy aflame. He cries unto Babel that he has "shot in Heaven God's great white horse!" and that God Himself hides behind angels for protection. Still greater cities smolder in Nimrod's brain, a town "such as not yet has mortal plotted and no angel dreamed." Its towers will cleave the heavens, lay siege to the inmost citadel and seize from God the reins of power and destiny, and those terrible storms through which the Maker subdues mankind: His lightnings, silences, "Wars, Feignings, Abominations," "His Furies—Retributions" that keep a perpetual feast on the human conscience. Having conquered these angelic beasts, Nimrod will capture the milder angels

> "Whose soft meek bodies sing like great white birds
> Beneath the golden forest of their deep wings."

Driving them before him down to the human plain, he will show his people "my triumph unbelievable," and force the meek-footed angels to behold "Her that is my Love, my Queen." Beholding her chambers, they will see

> "Our human beauty, how the pride of man
> Has waxed like cedars where the stars of God
> Walk forth for pleasure and His wind lies down."

Those angels shall become slavish allies and help him heave his "battle axe at God's own breast!"

> "Then will I plunge into His secret place
> And snatch from out His page that Hieroglyph."

Then, when "the great soft snow-white children," have accepted Nimrod's reign, he will lead them to where, "on a polished stone, as evidence that man shall pass away but he whose name endureth on that stone shall be remembered," and they shall cry: "Behold the man that snatched God's Word from Heaven, Great Nimrod!"

Part Three descends to a softer mood and movement. Nimrod goes to the queen like any husband to any wife after some worldly triumph. Rehearsing his recent conquest over the spec-

tral host, he demands: "Am I not Nimrod?" and Bathsheba replies: "Oh, thou art He." This simple response inspires a higher tirade: he rehearses his attack on the Lord, with mounting hyperbole, and demands:

> "Am I not as a city girt about
> With forests of tall spears? Am I not spread?"

This time, Bathsheba answers: "Thou art He." A still madder tirade recounts the building of Babel; Nimrod demands the name of the architect. It was not God, in his slothful ease, who perished of slow thirst in the desert, "smelted bronze in a furnace," or was "scourged with the slaves." It was Nimrod, unmoved by the Maker's jealousy, who created Babel. This time, lifting "her pale and awful beauty from his breast," the queen adds one word: "Lord, thou art He." The syllable goads him on. He casts his challenging eyes abroad and stands speechless

> With such a silence as should scourge the air
> More fearfully than does the hurricane.

The queen, "casting down her beauty at his feet," like the very earth, "waited for his wrath." It is no longer the queen, Babel or God, Nimrod harangues, but clouds, stars, hills, sky, sun, moon, wind—"Oh all ye visible things, Be purged of God." For God in his "monstrous heart" had claimed the authorship of Babel, and demanded that Nimrod write upon the stone Jehovah's name. Bathsheba rises in terror, urges him to make peace with God:

> "My Lord,
> Thou art vainglorious. Think upon the flood.
> Remember Adam."

She pleads with him to write down the Lord's name. Apparently, Nimrod intends to submit to her will. But after leaving her, and reviewing the marvelous ramifications of Babel, his reviving ego proves irresistible: he writes his own name on the stone.

Part Four opens with the wrath of the powers of the air, "snatching Heavenward that naked deed," and mounting to

God, "angry, amazed, terrific, smoking, furious and appalled, by earth affrighted." From the breast of God, a blazing angel flies to earth with the speech:

> "Oh blind, oh fatuous, knowing not thyself!
> For I that am in God am thine own soul,
> Thine own deep Self—unutterably real."

The angel argues that the workings of Babel are God's own, that Nimrod is a Prophet and Savior sent to earth to open citadels of communion between men and angels. He finds the king and queen in the midst of pageants and feasting. The angel is superbly described, at great length, through Nimrod's eyes. And Nimrod, viewing the benevolent creature, recognizes "his own deep self, unutterably real." In his hand, the angel holds "an awful sphere . . . a dreadful brightness, stranger than a star." Nimrod knows it as the Word, and looking into it, beholds the cosmos, and archangels supporting the bulwarks of Babel.

> Then Bathsheba drew down
> Great Nimrod's face unto her own and said,
> "Son of Almighty God—what hast thou done?
> Tell me, great Nimrod, hast thou kept His word?" . . .
> Then he cast down God's Word before her feet,
> And said, "Upon the stone I wrote God's name."

Part Five opens in Heaven, pianissimo. The mild-eyed angels await the return of the messenger. His terrible anguish, his flight through the air, his sudden apparition, are dramatically pursued. He floods the heavens with a tragic harangue:

> "What has been done on earth? What has been thought?
> What dreamed of? What conceived? . . ."

Instead of recounting Nimrod's apostasy, he returns to Eden, to Eve's "dark monstrosity—direful, new—" to "Man's disobedience," the "adulterous flesh" that "bred frightful progeny," and worst of all, the invention of death by Cain. Formerly, one could find words for such sins, but now?

> "What word shall shape before you this new thing?
> For never yet has man, who fashioneth

> Great cities and great progenies of dust,
> Created a new virtue; but his wit
> Conceives unnatural monsters of misdeed
> And fierce original crime. . . ."

The latest invention, limned in passionate detail, is Nimrod's lie. Superhuman grief bursts into superhuman rage and determination. Babel is doomed. The descent of the warring host, the destruction, are annihilatingly swift—

> There was a cry in Heaven, for all the host
> Of bright magnificence, with thundering voice,
> Shouted abroad in Heaven, "Great Babel Falls."
> Then that bright sea of plunging radiance
> Ebbed back to silence and eternal calm.

Parts Six and Seven are the most moving of all. First comes a broad, detailed description of the remains of the brazen city. The sentences are shorter, quieter, more reserved.

> Its towers had ceased like thunder. Its temples huge,
> Convulsed in mammoth shapes, crouched on the plain
> Like anguished gods—doomed and forever dumb.

Traditional wolf, jackal and owl infest the silent corridors. "A dark and awful shape loomed forth upon the rock and spread abroad its shadow in the waste." With horror-whitened hair and astonished face, Nimrod, towering alone, makes his way among the corridors, searching "for a thing forgotten—that being found he would remember it." Remembered Babel is reconstructed out of the mythologic ruins. Coming upon the polished stone of his iniquity, he "raised to Heaven a primeval cry." A new harangue pours from his mouth:

> For he alone of all that lived in Babel
> Remembered the old God-like words nor yet
> Had lost from off his tongue that ancient speech.

An Hebraic chant of grief and desolation, of intense moral fervor, calls on the men of Babel to "build new towns upon a distant plain."

> "If ye would have me with you, cry to me!
> But if ye fear me, silently depart."

They choose the latter course, angrily, silently. One last venerable friend, Assher, stays behind, but Nimrod, misunderstanding his motives, smites him down.

> Then was great Nimrod shaken grievously.
> And from the shadows moved a dreary shape
> And settled mournfully at Nimrod's feet,
> Unnoticed. . . .

For the remainder of the poem, we never lose sight of Bathsheba's silent shape. Lamentations and self-execration rend the air. Had his been a sin of the flesh, Nature might work her ancient cure. But this is a sin of the soul. Death has no boon for Nimrod. When he dies, Heaven will cry "Unclean! Unclean!" "Who am I? What? . . . Once did I have a name?" There is no place, no cranny for him. Even after death, if death is ever to come, he must be an ancient wanderer, "hounded by meteors, cast off by the stars, plunged into chaos." He asks not for mercy; he calls on the powers to be merciless. Invoking the spirit of Truth, he sees himself not as one inventing "some great new virtue, some unimagined good," but as one "lifting in accurséd hands

> "A fearful offering of archetypal woe,
> Deep in my breast an everlasting shame,
> And on my lips an immemorial lie."

He calls on Truth to make his "deep affliction deeper," so that

> "Greatest among the anguished gods of wrong—
> I will preserve my planetary throes—
> Nor yield my nature unto smaller pains."

In response to this cosmic prayer, a cloud of darkness from God's eyes "cast his consciousness in foggy night." A tremendous paroxysm, an epileptic madness, seizes Nimrod. Frightful aphasias follow: the sweetly singing speech of Babel turns to mongrel dissonances. Vacuity ensues; then a renewed effort to address Heaven; but only "muttering, peevish whispers, babble wild" issue forth. The great and ancient prayers are gone. "Silent he grew, choosing instead to be forever dumb." The

unnoticed shape stirs and sends up her soul to him, "as the old dead moon bids up the solemn tide." At sight of the queen, the king cries out in agony.

> Then did eternal silence seize upon his tongue
> And there was heard no more upon the earth
> The solemn beauty of that elder speech.

The poem might have closed here; and it was here my dread arose with respect to a further part. But the last short part opens with a vision of the race that went forth from Babel, carrying "monsters of bronze and grotesque images cast from the walls" by God's hand. We see how differences developed, how the race no longer lived in brotherhood, "but built cities against each other, breeders of war, and spoke with differing and hostile speech." Among these are "dark Nineveh—ferocious Babylon—" and we are left to imagine further cities down to the present. Nimrod is now "utterly alone," except for "the shape of earth-like desolation at his feet." There is no further speech between them. Nor does Nimrod any longer feel the cosmic lashings of the elements. The closing lines have the simple majesty of epic poetry. We have passed through Aristotle's terrifying and purifying dicta. Now comes the final calm. Nimrod lifts the woman at his feet, and points to the monstrous globule in the sky: "a vessel of pure fire, it moved serene." The poem ends:

> The moon shone over Babel—and it seemed
> As if an Angel, before celestial hosts,
> Raised in mid Heaven the eternal word of God.

This poem, written just before the World War, belongs to the present as well as the past. It seems to me more important than that later picture of chaos, T. S. Eliot's "The Waste Land" —the leading or misleading poem of the present generation. One might ask for more irony in "Nimrod," for the modern skeptic's query: If God created Nimrod, God, and not his mighty hunter, was responsible for the evil in Babel. But Miss Branch was not concerned with interpretation. She has left all overtones and afterthoughts to the reader. The author had a

story to tell and told no more. Her work also contains the necessary implications that complete a work of art. It is for such reasons I feel "Nimrod" to be the most remarkable dramatic narrative in American poetry and that I claim the national renascence did not begin with my own generation—as many of us so confidently avow.

Of the men to be considered, Markham and Wood, the oldest, belong closest to the present. Burton, Carman and Santayana carried on English traditions. So did Bennett and Rice in the South, Sterling in California. Garland, Piper and Moody developed the movement in the Middle-West. Markham and Moody sound conservative these days, where once they sounded radical. And Carman, who began like a vagabond, has shown in his "Oxford Book Of American Verse" how safe his tastes really were. We turn first of all to the deans, Markham and Wood. Wood, though born in Pennsylvania, is now identified with Oregon; Markham, born in Oregon, with Staten Island and Manhattan. Both are pioneer poets: Markham, the offspring of pioneer settlers, and Wood a Whitmanian who pursued a vein of his own. Markham also owes much to Walt, though "The Man With The Hoe" was composed in conventional metres. But what a poem this poem was, and still is.

It appeared with sensational effect just before the close of the last century, and marked a new protest in American poetry. One can find a demand, as early as Emerson, for the right of labor to enjoy the fruits of labor. One finds it again in Whittier, Lowell, Whitman. But never had a single, singing poem caught all the implications of the problem. Markham was a child of the industrial era, an era by no means over. Gathering its forces before the Civil War and creating, even more than negro slavery, the real issue between North and South, industrialism grew with the new Union and expanded with national expansion. "The Man With The Hoe" has grown with the growth of the problem. Democracy has not yet answered the questions of its principal offspring. Labor is much better off than the man in Millet's painting or Markham's poem—but only apparently. We have placed a machine in the man's hands. He

is no longer, to the outer eye, "bound by the weight of centuries." But our wiser society has evolved a subtler slavery. It may not be true now that "the dumb creature has no time to rest, no time to think, no time for the hopes that make us men." He has labor unions, a shorter working day, comforts his progenitors never dreamed of. But the inner eye can see that the fruits of the machine go to him in the smallest proportions. The machine owns him; and the middle class owns the machine. The five magnificent stanzas are still a passionate challenge. This is no occasional poem, nor mere propaganda; nor has the challenge been answered:

> O masters, lords and rulers in all lands,
> How will the Future reckon with this man?
> How answer his brute question in that hour
> When whirlwinds of rebellion shake all shores?
> How will it be with kingdoms and with kings—
> With those who shaped him to the thing he is—
> When this dumb terror shall rise to judge the world,
> After the silence of the centuries?

Jefferson, father of democracy, had envisioned this danger. Markham belongs to the Jeffersonian tradition. It is strange that most of his subsequent poetry is a reaction to English metrics. It has therefore few of the values pervading his splendid début. But in "Lincoln, The Man Of The People," issued two years after the Hoeman, Markham wrote one of the finest Lincoln poems after Whitman's. Though it has rhetorical faults, the poem moves the heart with a similar passion and vision. The Norn Mother comes down "to make a man to meet the mortal need," and mixes "the tried clay of the common road" with "a strain of prophecy."

> Here was a man to hold against the world,
> A man to match the mountains and the sea.

To the natural elements, the Mother adds pioneer virtues "sprung from the West."

> His words were oaks in acorns; and his thoughts
> Were roots that firmly gript the granite truth.

For the death of Lincoln, described in the last four lines, Markham, like Whitman, turned to Nature for a fitting ceremony:

> And when he fell in whirlwind, he went down
> As when a lordly cedar, green with boughs,
> Goes down with a great shout upon the hills,
> And leaves a lonesome place against the sky.

Lincoln, rather than Washington, is the epic hero of American poetry. Our best heroic poems have been inspired by the author of the "Gettysburg Address"—in itself a poem in prose.

Edwin Markham has since issued two other volumes, "Shoes Of Happiness" and "Gates Of Paradise," and several pamphlet poems. Though his more famous poems were written in middle life, he is still moved by what he calls a Social Vision, and in such poems as "The Fear For Thee, My Country," "The Jews," "The Chant Of The Vultures," "The Desire Of Nations," we read further evidences of his love for the underdog. The body of his remaining work contains tales about foreign lands, conventional lyrics and love poems. Of his many accomplished quatrains, the best is "Outwitted":

> He drew a circle that shut me out—
> Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout.
> But Love and I had the wit to win:
> We drew a circle that took him in!

The latest work of the indefatigable veteran is his lifelong anthology, "The Book Of Poetry": a double volume of eight hundred British and American poets and three thousand pages. The generous books came out when Markham was not quite seventy-five.

Charles Erskine Scott Wood's one famous poem is "The Poet In The Desert." This Whitmanesque dithyramb to freedom in the open spaces was not issued until Wood was sixty-three. It loses some of its power through its indebtedness to Whitman, but, as a panorama of the desert and a chant to the cause of marching freedom offered by Nature to man, it has original values. Wood, like Joaquin Miller, fell under the spell of the Far-West, and like Markham, was outraged by the slavery to

which American labor had been reduced. The poem contains an angry arraignment of industrialism. Markham disagrees with Wood's "extreme Libertarian ideas; but we can all agree with his prophet-like attack on social and industrial wrongs." Wood's poem rarely achieves the Hoeman's rounded harmony of protest and poetry. But it never degenerates to what Markham calls "bald pulpiteering." The moral of the poem is summarized in the line, "the law of Nature is freedom." No man can enjoy freedom the while fellow beings are held in bondage. The tone of denunciation is epitomized in a passage on Mammon:

> His greedy hands are folded upon
> His swollen belly.
> Into his maw flows an endless procession:
> Men with grey faces, women with sunken eyes,
> And the little children who have never laughed.

Though Wood did not create an independent poetic idiom, like Whitman before him and Sandburg after, he stands next to Markham at the dawn of the Twentieth Century. Turning to younger men who adhered to English traditions, we see how potent the two old brothers are. In Richard Burton of Hartford, the Canadian Carman and the Spanish Santayana, we have three fine poets, none of whom altered the course of American poetry. Burton, especially in his first book, "Dumb June," is the best lyrist of the three. In his next book, "Lyrics Of Brotherhood," 1899, he joined Markham in the song of the underdog. But Professor Burton is most at home among American people and things tuned to an English instrument. In this he bears a resemblance to Lizette Woodworth Reese. His skillful handling of varied metres, of harmonies of language, of the right syllable in the right place, is quite as admirable as hers. It is hard to account for the neglect he has earned of posterity. "Day Laborers" is a quiet portrait of old age "straggling down the street" to work. It is more effective than the brazen protest of Wood.

> Few sadder things on earth than toilsome age
> Without its dignities, its honored hairs;

A time of vacant mind and vassalage
Before the last grim change from mortal cares.

"Two Mountains" has the same grave air, and compares Mt. Monadnock with the man who loved Mt. Monadnock—Emerson. This is perhaps the finest poem on the poet "of bardic wonder," and closes on a perfect simile:

Monadnock, moveless, whatsoe'er the wind,
Like Emerson midst shifts of humankind.

Each page of "Dumb June" has some distinguished phrase, line, verse or poem. The book is admirable in its uniformity of mood and music. Any man attuned to Nature, especially New England Nature, the most mellow in America, is certain to write good poetry, no matter what his modes. The Yankee eye and ear for concrete facts has created the descendancy from Bryant to Dickinson, Emerson to Sill, Whittier to Frost. Burton belongs to this tradition, but his reticence, akin to Sill's, has robbed him of a larger audience. Nature saves a man from too much culture or over-civilization. "The Passing Of The Birds," "The Vanished Voice," "The Comfort Of The Stars," "Wood Witchery," "Spirits Of Summer," are informed with Burton's response to Nature and an escape from his fellows. As lonely and introspective as Sill, he confesses:

I strive to probe to other hearts, and find
I do but fret the phantoms of mine own;
I strive to paint great Nature, and my mind
But images itself in every zone.

In "The Comfort Of The Stars," "rebuked by Vast on Vast, my puny heart is greatened for its transitory part."

In "Wood Witchery," we get at the secret fascination Nature holds for down East poets and prose men: the play of eccentricity, the relation to myths of the past, the recurrence of Pan among the Puritans.

New England spelt but Arcady, the same
Unaging beauty by another name.

"Deserted Farms"—who has not seen and reflected on them?—needs but fourteen lines to show Lear forsaken by his daughters —New England deserted for the pioneer West or the "peopled cities." The historic exodus is caught in one sonnet. It is natural, too, that so grave a spirit should feel at home with death. "Mortis Dignitas," "The Bleak O' The Year," "The Ultimate"—these restrained poems contain ingredients of the later Robinson. There is a portrait of neighbors gathered about a dead man and expressing conflicting opinions on his merits and demerits. Only the woman who has known him best is silent, "and dreamt of heaven for his sake alone." "Masks" also resembles Robinson, or the Hawthorne who sought the heart of vice behind a virtuous exterior. The last four lines reach a broad conclusion:

> And, musing, on I strolled, debating how
> Mere masking tricks us all, and somewhat sad
> To learn the inner history of one
> Whose common title with the world was *saint*.

Burton belongs among the first "moderns" who turned to introspective psychology in an effort to sing the mysteries of the mind. If his name means little now, it is because, like Sill, he has been surpassed by Robinson and Frost.

Of Carman and Santayana, one cannot speak with so much conviction. Though Carman collaborated in "Songs Of Vagabondia," his is a conservative muse; and his "Oxford Book Of American Verse" has as little relation to the genius of our poetry as his poems have to the main body of our literature. Santayana is a distinguished philosopher who wrote undistinguished sonnets in his youth. From his four early volumes of verse, we move to the poetry in his philosophy, for not since Emerson and Nietzsche has there been as poetic an expression of a man's vision of the universe. A broad skeptic by nature, Santayana molded classical poems on his faith: that rounded Catholicism which embraces all schisms, including skepticism. The best criticism of his poetry lies embedded in his magic prose—a passage any poet might apply to his own work:

> Of impassioned tenderness or Dionysiac frenzy I have nothing, nor even of that magic and pregnancy of phrase—really the creation of a fresh idiom—which marks the high lights of poetry. Even if my temperament had been naturally warmer, the fact that the English language (and I can write no other with assurance) was not my mother tongue would of itself preclude any inspired use of it on my part; its roots do not quite reach my centre. I never drank in in childhood the homely cadences and ditties which in pure spontaneous poetry set the essential key.

Bliss Carman moved to the States in 1886, studied at Harvard, and lived among us and enjoyed wide popularity in popular circles up to his recent death. He was the unelected poet laureate of Canada and, despite his associations farther South, belonged closer to the country of his birth and closer still to the motherland. A youthful optimism and buoyancy of spirit, undisturbed by the moods of time and age, linked him with Hovey and the era of Hovey. It is to this limpid ease of expression that he owes his fame. Since the days of Vagabondia, about twenty volumes have come from his pen. "A Vagabond Song" might have been written by Hovey, just as much of Hovey might have been written by Carman:

> There is something in the autumn that is native to my blood—
> Touch of manner, hint of mood;
> And my heart is like a rhyme,
> With the yellow and the purple and the crimson keeping time.

This is catchy music, catchy enough for the popular ear content to be carried along without personal effort. A similar jauntiness invests "The Gravedigger"—usually a dolorous soul. Louis Untermeyer, himself a jubilant singer, has a congenital enthusiasm for such poetry. Rather given to optimism myself, I find it antipathetic. The joy sounds hollow and easy. Carman has acknowledged Browning as his master. But Browning's is a full-blooded optimism, shot through with tragic themes. The great Victorian never permitted himself to lilt as prettily as Carman did in his many April airs:

> Make me over, Mother April,
> When the sap begins to stir!

"Daisies" owes its inspiration to God's in his heaven, etc., the Pippa song which has ruined many promising poets. We shall see the finer aspects of Browning's influence when we come to Robinson, Pound and other American moderns who owe more to him than to Whitman.

Many of Carman's poems have been set to music, since the poetic demands of the average American composer are singularly inept. Something easy to go with his easy music is the most he asks for. A study of Carman's poetry would be thoroughly unfair which failed to recognize poems like "Hem And Haw." This ballad has the singing quality of the poet's other verse, but the matter is meaty, and the manner therefore more vital.

> Hem and Haw were the sons of sin,
> Created to shally and shirk;
> Hem lay 'round and Haw looked on
> While God did all the work.

The third verse may be cited as an apt riposte to poets who fail to appreciate one another:

> Hem was the father of bigots and bores;
> As the sands of the sea were they.
> And Haw was the father of all the tribe
> Who criticize to-day.

In 1893, Hamlin Garland issued his only volume of verse, "Prairie Songs." It has little interest now beyond the pages it added to the Middle-Western movement, founded by Gallagher, the Piatts and Howells, and achieving its renascence through Masters, Lindsay and Sandburg. Garland's real contribution lay in the field of fiction. Edwin Ford Piper, the Nebraskan, is a more important poet, though hardly comparable with the later Nebraskan, John G. Neihardt. Piper's "Barbed Wire" is based on the folk-balladry of the new country, with particular emphasis on cowboy songs. "Bindlestiff," his most notable ballad, is a blending of narrative with lyric snatches:

> Good-bye, farewell to Omaha,
> K. C., and Denver, too;

Put my foot on the flying freight,
Going to ride her through.

"Bindelstiff" belongs to the long and honorable line of American hobos. In the Far-West, Henry Herbert Knibbs extended sectional balladry in "Riders Of The Stars" and "Songs Of The Trail." Born the same year as the egregious Robert W. Service, Knibbs is the stouter singer. His ballads are based on reality, Service's on buncombe. In the South, three new poets carried on traditions unbroken by radical experiment. John Bennett, born in Chillicothe, Ohio, but long identified with Charleston, concerned himself with romantic fiction rather than close-up reality; and Beatrice Ravenel, with skillfully modeled adaptations of English lyrism. There is a richer, more realistic Southern vein in her latest volume, "The Arrow Of Lightning." Cale Young Rice, the Kentuckian, has been almost as prolific as his brother poet of the blue grass state, Madison Cawein. By a strange anomaly, Rice, a hostile critic of the free-verse movement, began writing free verse as early as his now extinct volume, "From Dusk To Dusk." By a further anomaly, his most recent and perhaps his best book, "Stygian Freight," vies with the youngest generation in audacities of theme. In between, Rice was content to produce volume after volume of classical poems and dramas so as "not to be out of harmony with the immemorially practiced principles of verse music." Ever popular with magazine editors, his poetry has found begrudging favor with critics and anthologists. It is as if posterity preferred to let this verse bury itself under its own classicism. It is possible that Rice's antipathy toward the newest generation has filled him with the most potent inspiration he has ever known, and that some of the poems of "Stygian Freight" will survive the bulk of his "immemorial" verse.

Classical idioms, vitalized with living images, found finer artists in the two poets who remain for discussion: William Vaughn Moody and George Sterling. Of the four fine poets who were born sixty years ago, these two are gone; Robinson and Masters remain. Moody died at the beginning of his prime, in 1910; Sterling, for reasons no man has divulged, died of his

own hand a few years ago. They are among the most puzzling figures in American poetry. Both had remarkable gifts and both have been ecstatically praised and overrated. Both possessed rare qualities, qualities they rode too hard. Moody and Sterling were drunken with beauty and the cosmos, to which the former added a strong moral fibre, an athletic sense of justice. And both were enslaved by a love of bookishness, of rhetoric, of concerns extraneous to intrinsic poetry. Yet they wrote memorable poems and a few that achieved quasi greatness. Were it not for a man like Robinson, these two poets would loom larger.

George Sterling was born at Sag Harbor, N. Y., and emigrated westward before his thirtieth year. He soon took his place as the most distinguished Far-Western poet just after Joaquin Miller. Miller's finer poems have an uncouth outdoor quality; Sterling's belong to the cultivated indoors. Even when he wrote of Nature, his muse assumed a rhetorical orotundity. He tried, more desperately than any other poet excepting Moody, to seize and fill out the proportions of the masters. Sterling depended too little on himself, and in his dependence on the masters, chose the minor poets of verbal magic: Keats, Shelley, Swinburne. Sterling published ten volumes, mostly in San Francisco, and his fame penetrated eastward through "A Wine Of Wizardry," 1908. One recalls the tremendous reception the poem received. Some hailed it as evidence of "a new planet." But the wizardry was borrowed, and the amazing rhetoric almost devoid of life and human contact. Occasionally, the Californian turned to less cosmic affairs and wrote endearing music. Even in "The Last Days," his most appealing Nature poem, he could not escape the esthetic cult. Beauty, employed too often, becomes little more than a word.

> Days departing linger and sigh:
> Stars come soon to the quiet sky;
> Buried voices, intimate, strange,
> Cry to body and soul of change;
> Beauty, eternal fugitive,
> Seeks the home that we cannot give.

This appeal has a pre-Raphaelitic ineffableness. It has the correct melancholy as applied to the popular idea of Beauty, spelled with a capital, and personified as an effeminate female we cannot capture even when she woos us. One is reminded of Poe and his disembodied ladies. If beauty is to be caught at all, the poet must be heartily robust and string his courtship with passion.

The best of Sterling may be found in his sonnets. Though they are grandiose, they challenge the imagination; one accepts the classical beat, the vast implications. "Omnia Exeunt In Mysterium" is carved in the poet's prevailing mood. The restless nomad is announced in the opening line, "The stranger in my gates—lo! that am I." Nor has this stranger any "land of birth," nor any "hidden land" in the hereafter. He is "a dim and solitary traveler on ways that end in evening and the waste." The same cosmic sigh rises from "Kindred"; and in "The Dust Dethroned," we hear "Sargon is dust, Semiramis a clod!" These are literary emotions, and accepting them as such, one can enjoy their superb artifice. This sonnet closes on, "The skull of Pharaoh staring at the sky." Had Shelley not written "Ozymandias," the greatest modern sonnet on the vanity of kings, Sterling's would sound convincing as a direct echo, not of poetry but of life. No American ever encountered the following experience outside of books:

> Their mouths have drunken the eternal wine—
> The draught that Baal in oblivion sips.
> Unseen about their courts the adder slips,
> Unheard the sucklings of the leopard whine;
> The toad has found a resting-place divine,
> And bloats in stupor between Ammon's lips.
> O Carthage and the unreturning ships,
> The fallen pinnacle, the shifting Sign!

The head admires the skillful parade of archaic images; the heart remains unmoved. And the fulsome use of such words as eternal, oblivion and divine, loses the larger connotations inherent in smaller, commoner words graced with majesty. Cosmic absurdity is betrayed in "Willy Smith At The Ball Game." This is a tragic poem—tragic for Sterling. Baseball, the Ameri-

can game of games—Willy Smith, a perfect kid name—one grins in advance, and sits down beside Willy among the red-hot fans in the quarter bleachers. But what is this in the very first couplet?

> Happy, he heard the crass brass band—
> Music adrift from Samarkand.

The crass brass band is perfect, but Samarkand and—

> On breath of trumpets faintly blown
> From walls where Helen walked alone—

are dumbfounding. To be sure, the poet is going to prove that our sympathies are immortally faithful to the home team. We'd love to help Willy cheer if our team were three runs behind in the ninth, three men on bases, two strikes and three balls on the batter, and a Ruthian clout over the fence, but—

> Bending above the lists he saw
> The workings of colossal Law:
>
> A world arraigned saw justice done
> And good enthroned: the home team won!

If this were a humorous poem, how funny it would be. But it is absolutely solemn, and instead of mighty Casey, Pop Anson, Radbourne or Rusie, we are introduced to St. George, Sir Nigel, Drake and Achilles. It was precisely against such obsolescence that the free verse rebellion arose. Like Cale Young Rice, the genial Sterling hated and fought this movement heartily. But just before his death, he accepted the radical verse of his fellow Californian, Robinson Jeffers, and wrote a rapturous study of that iconoclast.

On occasion, Sterling turned his dreamy eye to the soil and skies of California and wrote his best poems. "The Black Vulture," with its symbol of the pride of man a-wing in aeroplanes, is a great sonnet. High above all things, the vulture "holds unshared the silence of the sky," and looks down upon "the eagle's empire and the falcon's home—"

> And least of all he holds the human swarm—
> Unwitting now that envious men prepare

To make their dream and its fulfillment one,
When, poised above the caldrons of the storm,
Their hearts, contemptuous of death, shall dare
His roads between the thunder and the sun.

"Pumas" gains a similar power through a further comparison with mankind. "Hushed, cruel, amber-eyed . . . the great cats seek their prey." Man does not enter the poem until it is nearly over—

Man, who is made more terrible far than they,
Dreams he is otherwise!

"The Master Mariner" is a poignant lyric contrasting the ways of Sterling and his grandsire. The father is a man of action, the son a man of letters.

My grandsire sailed three years from home,
And slew unmoved the sounding whale:
Here on a windless beach I roam
And watch far out the hardy sail.

One thinks somehow of the master whaleman, Melville, and his great epic of the sea: Sterling's poem is a great song of the seashore. Contrasts between sire and son mount vividly. The sire knows the fangs of "the lions of the surf." The son knows only their roar. The sire "in his ample fist" upheld "the long harpoon."

Behold obedient to my wrist
A grey gull's feather for my pen!

The "bitter bronze" of five zones has marked the sire's "leathern cheek." The son longs to follow him, but can only sigh, "Not yet." And finally,

I think my grandsire now would turn
A mild but speculative eye
On me, my pen and its concern,
Then gaze again to sea—and sigh.

This poem unfolds the whole of George Sterling's life and art. It is a tragic epitome of the adventure of many American poets among books and bookishness. Sterling evaded life

through literature, and escaped literature through death. The last act of his life was the greatest hazard he ever sought.

In some respects, William Vaughn Moody is an even more puzzling figure than Sterling. Moody was a lover of life, an athlete, an optimist, whose passion for books often obscured his poetry. Steeped in contemporary problems, he had thoroughly liberal views in national affairs and sided with unpopular minorities. Hating the expansion of his country beyond its own borders, he was the first poet to inveigh against threats of an American empire: "On A Soldier Fallen In The Philippines," and "Quarry." In his relation to woman, he was the modern male searching the heart of an equal. He had, moreover, a strenuous faith in Christianity. One is not puzzled by what Moody achieved; one wonders why he did not achieve more. Possibly, had he lived longer, he would have become one of our major poets. He died at the dawn of his maturity.

Moody was born in Indiana and spent a good many years in the growing metropolis of Chicago. Many other years were given to European travel and the mastery of languages, to teaching at the University of Chicago, and to the compilation of scholarly works. A superb teacher, Moody disliked pedagogy. Any one who has talked or written about poets will agree with him: "At every lecture I slay a poet." Hampered by the economic problem, Moody had to teach; his duties deployed energies required for the still more arduous labors of poetry. Torn between the books he read and those he wrote, his poetry fell short of the completest originality. Moody came under the heroic spell of the Greeks, Dante, Shakespeare and Milton, and the romantic spell of Keats, William Morris, Whitman and Browning. The bulk of his poetry is rather self-centred and therefore difficult, too difficult to read. In a determination to write out of the best in himself, he sedulously avoided the obvious and resorted to an involved diction, a carelessness of communication. Only once did he address an audience *vis-à-vis,* and, tragically enough, "The Great Divide," an apparent potboiler, was the only work to win a huge success. Finally relieved of economic worriment, Moody died three years later.

"The Great Divide" succeeded where his poetic dramas had failed. Most of his other work on American themes lacks the concrete directness of the pot-boiler. Though critics hailed him as the great poet of the West, he was a transplanted Yankee preacher and moralist. His spirit belonged to the pioneer Puritans who had settled the Middle-West. The preacher often defeats the poet, and the optimist is too one-sided. Of his other plays, "The Fire-Bringer," "The Masque Of Judgment," "The Death Of Eve," the last has the richest promise. He did not live to complete it. One therefore looks for the best of Moody in the collected poems, and among the lyrics of the dramas.

In "Pandora's Song" from "The Fire-Bringer," Moody, like Browning, sings his faith in woman, and through her, his belief in the identity of God and man. Pandora can feel God walking about her heart and hear Him finding the seasons in her—"everything as on my heavenly hills." Paganism and Christianity woo each other here. Among his other poems to woman, "The Death Of Eve," "I Am The Woman," "The Daguerreotype," "Heart's Wild-Flower" and "The Golden Journey" stand out. "The Death Of Eve" has superb visions and passages, but cosmic intentions involve the poet in fulsome flights. "I Am The Woman" is an exultant chant reminiscent of Whitman's "Children Of Adam." Most appealing is Moody's tribute to his mother, "The Daguerreotype." Even here, the will to say all leads him to say more than is necessary. The cosmic waylays him again and, as in Browning, optimistic didacticism interferes with the poet. The poem opens like one of Browning's dramatic lyrics:

> This, then, is she,
> My mother as she looked at seventeen,
> When she first met my father. Young incredibly,
> Younger than spring, without the faintest trace
> Of disappointment, weariness, or tean
> Upon the childlike earnestness and grace
> Of the waiting face.

This is a natural order of images. The speech, except for "tean," is human; the lines have the spontaneous irregularity

of modern poetry. Studying the daguerreotype, the poet is haunted by the perennial doubt of the son's worth in the remembered presence of the mother. There are gray recollections of the children round her bed and chair, sharp reminiscences of the death-bed. When the stoical father rose, "we knew that she was dead." The boy, "being unable to bear the insults which time flings us for our proof," rushes forth into the "alien sunshine merciless," hating and challenging God. The remembered mother remains as the inspiration and test of the growing man, now holding her image in hand. The rest of the poem lacks the natural movement of the opening.

For the eccentric side of Moody, we turn to a totally different poem: "The Menagerie." Behind the extravagant fooling, the evolutionary theory is noisily propounded. The language is amazing. Moody let go the full tide of his American nature and indulged the slang of streets and of public parks. At times, the vernacular is forced, but it is a forerunner of methods employed by Sandburg in "Chicago Poems." Moody has just visited the zoo; his fancy plays strange capers.

> I'll foot it home, to try and make believe
> I'm sober. After this I stick to beer,
> And drop the circus when the sane folks leave.
> A man's a fool to look at things too near:
> They look back, and begin to cut up queer.

The poet feels his kinship with the brutes, and sees "Nature working out her plan . . . from mastodon to mite . . . to find at last the shape and soul of Man." The sight of this final shape, seen by the brutes inside the cages, causes them to grin at "a little man in trousers, slightly jagged." After all, "tumblebugs and angleworms have souls as well"—"there's soul in everything that squirms." All these souls are "pestered with the thought of wings." The satire on the survival of the fittest, examined by the jury of beasts, closes on a note of shoddy humor:

> If you're a sweet thing in a flower-bed hat,
> Or her best fellow with your tie tucked in,
> Don't squander love's bright springtime girding at

An old chimpanzee with an Irish chin:
There may be hidden meaning in his grin.

"The Quarry" is a finer symbolical animal poem. It reveals a sacred snow-white elephant upon whose back "a huge pagoda towered full of brass gods and food of sacrifice." The elephant is China, and the European powers are described as threatening "brutes of prey, their several hates laid by until the sharing of the spoil." They return at regular intervals for a further dismemberment of China, and among them the poet, detecting democratic America, cries out: "Alas! What dost thou here? What dost *thou* here?" This gorgeous poem, written in 1900, might have been written a year or two ago, and doubtless will need revival a year or two hence. Moody attacked every sign of American expansion, and, in a simpler, clearer poem, "On A Soldier Fallen In The Philippines," made a direct appeal to the American conscience. The last of the three stanzas asks for "a flag for the soldier's bier," lest he see the nation, "robed in gloom" striving with its "faithless past."

Let him never dream that his bullet's scream went wide of its island mark,
Home to the heart of his darling land where she stumbled and sinned in the dark.

Moody's was a lusty patriotism akin to Lowell's. "An Ode In Time Of Hesitation" suffers, like American odes in general, from occasional grandiloquence and obscurity. And yet, there are fiery passages in the poem inspired by St. Gaudens' statue to Robert Gould Shaw, who was killed at the head of the first negro regiment to enlist on the Northern side in the Civil War. Standing in front of the statue, the poet "hears the distant spring come up the land," and though "the tides of people go heedless" and "the trees upon the Common show no hint of green," he is assured of the earth's "jubilant emprise,"

And it is clear to my long-searching eyes
That love at last has might upon the skies.

A superb panorama follows, a panorama worthy of Whitman. The imagination is carried from Virginia and the Carolinas to

the Gulf, from Massachusetts to Chicago, through the Great Lakes and the Rockies, up to Mt. Shasta signaling the Alaskan seas

> That watch old sluggish glaciers downward creep
> To fling their icebergs thundering from the steep.

"Far Hawaii crowned with palms" is

> A rich seal on the ocean's bosom set
> To say that East and West are twain.

The vision of the sculptured men provides the standard of freedom against slavery all over the earth. The battle and death of the little company are poignantly rehearsed and out of their grave, "nature's busy old democracy" (a phrase out of Whitman) flushes mountain and sea with the spirit of these negroes. Here is the voice of the Yankee Abolitionist now directing its thunders against chaining the dark race of the Philippines to the heels of America, exultant with power. The poet demands whether we are "the eagle nation Milton saw mewing its mighty youth" or

> Some gross-billed wader where the swamps are fat?
> Some gorger in the sun? Some prowler with the bat?

The ode closes with an attack on politicians: "Blindness we may forgive, but baseness we will smite."

The poem was written in 1900. The Philippines were annexed and later rebellions skillfully subdued. The islands are now represented in Congress. The blindness or baseness, or whatever it was, are forgotten and Moody's prophecy remains a prophecy. Walter Pater's dictum that "no great political poem can be written while men still care for the issues involved" is the type of plea for sheer estheticism which, happily now and then, has been ignored by poets who forget beauty in the interests of the human race. Freneau's voice rose at the beginning of the nation fighting for liberty; Whittier's at the beginning of abolitionism; Lowell's and Whitman's at the beginning of the new Union; Moody's at the beginning of empire. Moody belonged to the intellectual minority and addressed himself to his

own class. It is easy to show the poet his province is rhyming, not reasoning. But if poets failed to break the rules now and then, the art would have perished ages ago. One's hope for the art of the next Ishmael contains a plea for a less intellectual, a more human appeal. Such an appeal cannot prevail against the larger appeal of the people's so-called representatives. In order to live beyond its own generation, the appeal should address the future as well. Such a demand requires a man-poet like Milton. Moody, for all his transcendent effort, was no Milton.

This puzzling poet was equally moved by social and economic problems. "The Brute" is a powerful portrait of the new American machine. The opening stanza marches shoulder to shoulder with Markham's Hoeman:

> Through his might men work their wills.
> They have boweled out the hills
> For food to keep him toiling in the cages they have wrought.

And they fling him limbs of men, children's souls and hearts of women, "but he gives them scanty thought." The vision of the progress of machinery into present times is unerring, and devoid of the sentimental notion that the monster is in itself evil. The poet derides the view of later intellectuals who, dreading the machine, yearn for former eras with nostalgic sighs. He shows that Frankenstein must be tamed to serve his inventors, so that, "at the last day," men "will whistle him away" and lead him to the Lord to be honored, not condemned:

> Then the Lord will heed their saying, and the Brute come to his own,
> 'Twixt the Lion and the Eagle, by the armpost of the Throne.

This man is ahead of present-day poets who flee to proverbial woods and ivory towers for the solace of Nature and Art against the inroads of the machine. If a poet is not first and last a man what place has he among men? And if he join not the human march of what use is his art? One does not ask his work to be utilitarian. In the final analysis, he writes his poetry to be read. If it is written for himself and his private group, it will die of the self-admiration it feeds upon. "The Brute" dis-

closes the power of the creative intuition in advance of the reasoned activities of the scientist and philosopher. The real poet contains all men in himself. So does any creative spirit. Moody had this power at his best. The artist in him was only able to complete the man at rare intervals. He did not live long enough for the two to assimilate each other and mellow. Originality and tradition had not had the opportunity of blending. For a final comment on Moody, one turns to an early poem: "Gloucester Moors." It is deservedly his most famous poem.

It opens with a beautifully simple image of Gloucester town, "where the fishing fleets put in." The flowers of the moors are described with a delicate speech. But this is to be something more than a picture of intimate things. Nor is the earth considered solely as the nutriment of flowers. Beneath him the poet feels

> Her smooth bulk heave and dip;
> With velvet plunge and soft upreel
> She swings and steadies to her keel
> Like a gallant, gallant ship.

The poet asks God whether the earth "knows her port, though she goes so far about?"

> I watched when her captains passed:
> She were better captainless.
> Men in the cabin, before the mast,
> But some were reckless and some aghast,
> And some sat gorged at mess.

Turning back from the noisome hold to those on deck, the poet cries "Give help!" and is answered with: "Let be: Our ship sails faster thus." Gently, the flower theme returns, but this time the stanza closes on:

> Who has given to me this sweet,
> And given my brother dust to eat?
> And when will his wage come in?

The poet turns to the homecoming "boats from the fishing banks," and urges the little sails to make haste, for there are dollars to spend, "wives to be embraced,"

Hearts to borrow and hearts to lend,
And hearts to take and keep to the end.

From the little ships, he turns back to the earth-ship, arriving at its destined harbor. Voicing the democratic creed, Moody concludes:

Shall all the happy shipmates then
Stand singing brotherly?
Or shall a haggard ruthless few
Warp her over and bring her to,
While the many broken souls of men
Fester down in the slaver's pen,
And nothing to say or do?

In approaching the contemporary scene in American poetry, the student is faced with a number of difficult problems. The most difficult will be the effort to attain a clear detachment toward poets whose kinship with himself may lure him into eyeing them through himself. His praise is liable to attend those most like himself, his impatience or carelessness those most unlike. He will face added difficulty in considering poets younger than himself, and here, because of a greater scarcity of published material, he will have less ground from which to draw finalities. He will have to use conjecture where conjecture is insufficient and unfair. He will drop into words like "promise," only to learn, if he live long enough, that the promise of a certain younger poet is nearer achievement than the bulky work of men of his own age whom he has crowned with ecstasy. He will attempt to avoid friendships and enmities as the worst of critical plagues, and to weigh the values of conservative and radical, tradition and experiment, without of necessity weighing one against the other. He will try to fix his eye on poetry, regardless of isms, camps, hostilities, personal experience, changes in taste, disappointments, disillusionment. He will keep his heart and head open, his imagination dynamic. If he contradicts himself, he will do so in the best of company, and console himself that the fathers of the race, Emerson and Whitman, did the same.

A man who lived at the heart of the national renascence, of

the poetic civil war of 1912 to '18, is in a predicament with respect to an ideal impersonality. New names came up with amazing rapidity and variety. Some of the boldest have vanished or diminished; some of the slowest and least showy have persevered and prevailed. Personally, I like to set the dawn of the renascence around 1912, without losing sight of the men and women who emerged just before. This was the year a number of experimental ventures opened their covers to poets who could not wedge their way into the old, commercial magazines. With the advent of *The Lyric Year* and *The New Republic* in New York, of *Poetry* and *The Little Review* in Chicago, of *The Poetry Journal* in Boston, supported by the anthological activities of William Stanley Braithwaite, Jessie B. Rittenhouse and others, and by The Poetry Society Of America and its tributaries, the young unknowns were greeted by a growing audience. *The Poetry Magazine,* led by Harriet Monroe, adopted Whitman's maxim: "To have great poets you must have great audiences." This redoubtable woman, more than any other editor, devoted her life to the cause of American poetry. The next few years brought further ventures into the field: *The Seven Arts, Contemporary Verse, The Freeman* and *Others.* And among the sudden host of young publishers, Kennerley, Knopf, the Bonis, Liveright, Harcourt, Seltzer and others were important links in encouraging the new movement, and were joined by such older firms as Macmillan's, Harper's, Houghton Mifflin. The daily papers developed larger departments of literary criticism: poets were assured of a more competent, if not perfect, consideration of their work. Not the least stimulating factors were the controversies of the time. Though conservatives held the posts of honor and had the last word in the press, Ezra Pound and Amy Lowell had no difficulty in gaining publicity for their respective ideals. Most of the radicals had little or nothing to say outside their poetry; charges brought against them were taken up by Pound and Miss Lowell. It is a matter of delight to recall that most of the outcries came from conservative camps and that most of the battles were fought, not between poets, but critics. At times a conservative poet put

on the critic's armor: the earlier leaders of such warfare were Louis Untermeyer and Conrad Aiken. Nor did the outbreak of the World War subdue the ardor of poets and critics. The heights of the renascence were scaled during 1915, '16 and '17.

Here is a partial list of poets whose first books or first important books appeared between 1912 and '18: The Imagists, Conrad Aiken, William Rose and Stephen Vincent Benét, Carl Sandburg, Edgar Lee Masters, Robert Frost, Vachel Lindsay, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Louis and Jean Starr Untermeyer, James Oppenheim, Maxwell Bodenheim, Ezra Pound, H. D., Amy Lowell, John Gould Fletcher, Adelaide Crapsey, Lola Ridge, Donald Evans, Arturo Giovannitti, William Carlos Williams, Archibald MacLeish, Robinson Jeffers, etc. Among the older poets, Robinson, whose first book appeared in 1896, did not gain sound recognition until twenty years later: "The Man Against The Sky." One must add other workers in the more conservative forms who won a large recognition: Joyce Kilmer, Witter Bynner, Arthur Davison Ficke, John Hall Wheelock, William Ellery Leonard, Sara Teasdale, etc. Not long after the close of the World War came the first books of T. S. Eliot, Wallace Stevens, Marianne Moore, Elinor Wylie, E. E. Cummings, Wallace Gould. And most of these poets had contributed distinguished work, during the war years, to magazines and anthologies. It is difficult to avoid confusion among so many fine names. Without embracing an arbitrary scheme or too close an alignment of groups, one must approach such a record with a pliant system and leave many conclusions to the reader and to the future. Most of these men and women are still writing poetry. Final judgments cannot be made where records are incomplete. And there remain the latest generation and future generations!

For the beginnings of the renascence, one turns back, as one always turns back, to New England; and one moves forward to the Middle-West, now at the height of its powers. One turns also to a strange soil for American poetry: the exotic movement overseas which gave birth to Imagism under the early leadership of Ezra Pound of Idaho. The pioneer group which raced to

London on the heels of Whistler and Henry James caused radical national changes without concerning itself, except in exceptional cases, with the native soil. Out of the New England which survives all epitaphs, came Robinson, Frost, Miss Millay, Miss Lowell; out of the Middle-West, Masters, Lindsay, Sandburg; out of expatriation, Pound, H. D., Fletcher, Eliot. A little later, when the renascence penetrated southward, we come to Elinor Wylie, to DuBose Heyward and the Charleston group, John Crowe Ransom and the Nashville Fugitives, and to the negro rebirth through James Weldon Johnson, Countee Cullen, Langston Hughes, etc. The national movement began with no one name or locality. And in examining its records and tendencies, we have to guard against such interchangeable terms as radical and conservative. The matter may be radical and the manner conservative, or vice versa. A conclusion would be hasty indeed which consigns the poetry of the leading Yankees, Robinson and Frost, to a conservative camp. Such a deduction is particularly easy regarding the former. A careless eye and ear would decide: Robinson belongs entirely to the past: here are no new forms, but a strict adherence to classic blank verse, sonnets, ballads. And yet, a more independent spirit has never come out of a New England already famous for a long line of independent spirits. A study of the national renascence should open therefore with the man born sixty years ago: Edwin Arlington Robinson.

XVIII

THE WISE MUSIC OF ROBINSON

Nor shall we longer disagree
On what it is to be sublime,
But flourish in our perigee
And have one Titan at a time.
Edwin Arlington Robinson.

THE data concerning the life of Robinson are few, fortunately few. He is not of those poets of an earlier or later time, like Poe or Bodenheim, whose glamorous lives overshadow their poetry. Here, as with Emerson and Emily Dickinson, the book tells all we need to know of the author. Extraneous facts disclose that Robinson was born, like Longfellow and Edna Millay, in Maine, that he spent two years at Harvard, issued a private volume of poems in 1896, and a public volume, "The Children Of The Night," in '97. A little later, he came to New York and gave himself to the dual tradition of poetry and poverty. Among his early friends were such stimulating men as Moody and Ridgely Torrence. "Captain Craig" appeared in 1902 and a new edition of "The Children" in 1905. The latter was reviewed in *The Outlook* by Theodore Roosevelt. "It is rather curious," the critic wrote, "that Mr. Robinson's volume should not have attracted more attention," and still more curious that it attracted the attention of an American President. Roosevelt found a modest position for the poet in the Custom House. He resigned after five years and devoted his remaining life to poetry. In 1910, "The Town Down The River" appeared, and the following year, Robinson made that connection with the MacDowell Colony in New Hampshire which has been of the greatest benefit in affording leisure to write what it pleased him to write. The bulk of his work has been written at Peterboro. Except for one short trip to England, where he came and went quietly, the poet has wintered in

New York and summered at the Colony. On the surface, his has been the most uneventful of lives and one of the slowest to receive recognition. It was not until 1916, when "The Man Against The Sky" appeared, that he was genuinely recognized, and this was partly due to the widespread interest in modern poetry. One doubts whether his sudden fame affected Robinson, and one may be sure that he shrank from the publicity accorded him on his fiftieth birthday, when gushing poets and critics paid homage to him en masse. Despite the Pulitzer prize awards and the crowning of "Tristram" by The Literary Guild, the poet has shunned notoriety and has remained, in the midst of his friendships, an inveterate hermit. Among the poets of an earlier day, he remained aloof from a world of glib optimism; among the poets of the civil war, he lived like a man in the wilderness.

There is always light in Robinson, the magic by which an owl sees through the darkness. As early as "The Children Of The Night," the poet gave himself to truth and wisdom so far as they can be captured by the limited human consciousness. In the light of the Aldriches and Gilders of Longfellow's sentimental tradition and of the cheerful warblers of the Vagabondia stamp, "The Children" created little comment. Even in the light of the robust Browning from whom Robinson learned so much, this is a curious volume. The young poet derived from the lusty Victorian, not his Christian philosophy, but the lyric form in which that faith was dramatized. It does not follow that Robinson is a pessimist. He is simply, more than any poet of his era, an offspring of the scientific urge. His work is compact, neither of light nor of darkness, but of light and darkness, and of other supposed antitheses of the human mind: faith and skepticism, tragedy and comedy. He sees each part in relation to the whole, and is therefore the first of American tragi-comedians. A tragi-comedian is the subtlest and most difficult of men to comprehend, and the haze which greeted Robinson was due to the continued immaturity of the American mind. In "The Children Of The Night," a mature man was born, a man devoted to a tenacious singleness of vision.

Much he has written and much he still writes is puzzling, even to minds priding themselves on their subtlety. The poet's greatest strength contains his greatest weakness.

Robinson is one of the principal characters in his own work. His favorite character is the man who fails while seeking the highest light. He is constantly absorbed in these quasi immortal failures, and through them, the failure of even the best of beings to survive the outlines of time. His art is salutary in its austere devotion to intangible truth and its downright acceptance of the defeat of the noblest of characters. But the defeat is also a triumph, and the Robinsonian character a small hero groping through time and eternity. Success has no place here, especially not the American god of success. Thus one can feel the poet himself, in the face of his forty-year service, eyeing his own success with serene skepticism. One can almost be certain that he would be the first to spell defeat for his life-work, a defeat which spurs him to further effort. He will go on attacking the musical windmills of poetry with the blind faith of a Don Quixote. Robinson is a knight in the tournament which destroyed not only Camelot, but which threatens to destroy his own land in the midst of its apparent victories. His country is only a part of the whole, an earthly element as susceptible to extinction as Judea, Greece, Rome, Camelot. A salutary vision indeed, as salutary in its unblinking courage as the deep serenities of Emerson or the passionate tumults of Whitman.

It is typical of America, the growing polyglot, to give us such a man. It proves that our soil is experimental ground where the older races, blindly intermingling, give birth to the newer and stranger. Here, at the core of the greatest material triumph in history, comes one who insists, in restrained American speech couched in classical forms, that the triumph is temporal and final defeat inevitable. The very virtues that reared the edifice contain the vices to undermine and destroy it. The elegy the poet chants over the memory of a friend, over a group, over an extinguished race, is his own elegy, and that of his race, and of the whole human race on its defiant way to death.

Man is the hero of the tale, and the heroine his great ally and enemy, darling of his heart and his superior, according to Robinson. Like the German Goethe, this poet might have sung: "*Das ewig Weibliche zieht uns hinan.*" But woman is often the devil in Robinson's view. His perpetual antitheses attempt to draw woman, as all else, in the round, and to show her leading us down to hell and up to heaven, or moving along with her mate through the heavenly hell or hellish heaven which is life as this poet beholds it.

In "The Children Of The Night," we read those first sonnet-ballads of Tilbury Town, antedating by twenty years the famous epitaphs of Masters' "Spoon River." The mature young poet has a keen insight into his Yankee neighbors, and a gift for restrained dramatics, for a novel in fourteen lines. A youthful master over the multiple apparatus of plot and characterization has arrived on the American scene. But the play unfolds in the private closet of the imagination, of psychologic poetry. There is no room for artificial footlights. What wasted material, the playwright and novelist sigh, for here is the work of those men in embryo, with no need for further development. Richard Cory, envy of the town, who "glittered when he walked," "went home and put a bullet through his head." Cliff Klingenhagen, who filled one glass with wine and the other with wormwood and "lightly quaffed" the latter, is a very happy fellow. And "the shop-worn brotherhood" of clerks are no more pitiful than the poets and kings who are the clerks of Time. And the butcher, Reuben Bright, is "no more a brute" than his neighbors. When his wife died, he "made the women cry to see him cry." A new note has entered American poetry: the passion for the Yankee vernacular that distinguishes Robinson and Frost. Understatement and indirection, comparisons and antitheses, the subtlest variations of meaning amid the simplest speech, will ultimately become Robinson's greatest strength and weakness. He will overdo the tendency at times; it will become a palpable trick, the now-you-see-it-now-you-don't of the shell game. His determination to view all sides in the shortest possible time will lure him

into stating things we feel implicitly, or falling into abstractions where a forthright line would be more natural. The poet of this first volume is a realistic psychologist, a scientific musician. Strangely for a Yankee, he pins his artistic faith to Crabbe, Thomas Hood, Verlaine and Zola. The "hard human pulse" of Crabbe will become Robinson's own ideal; "the vigor of his name" will prove that our books "are as altars where we kneel to consecrate the flicker, not the flame." Hood is the ideal tragi-comedian "who cloaked his bitterness within this winding-sheet of puns and pleasantries." Verlaine is the immortal underdog, the fascinating failure who, none the less, is "the star that shines on Paris now." And Zola is one who finds "the divine heart of man" inside "the racked and shrieking hideousness of Truth." To these early influences will be added a love of the dramatic lyrism of Browning, of the Wordsworthian discovery of the poetry inherent in common speech, and of that Elizabethan gusto over which the Bard of Avon is the regent of all time. Each influence has already been reduced to the microscopic lens of the silent youth in his study. A mere sonnet—and most of these things are sonnets—will do. The intimate gem will catch the cosmic likeness of a man. And the speech will be, not Zola's, Browning's or the Bard's, but the peculiar Yankee twang of the tragi-humorous Puritan. These sonnets are not Petrarchan, Shakespearean, Verlainian: they are Robinsonian. They are therefore not classical, but modern; not conservative, but radical; not reactionary, but living. And this unusual first volume contains that villanelle, "The House On The Hill," with its Robinsonian view of life in death and death in life.

Here is the elegiac mood of youth, of the growing man and the mature. It is neither tragic nor resigned. It faces the facts, states them for what they are, states them musically. The Robinsonian ear is faultless, at times too faultless. Rarely, if ever, does he break the rules, the so-called laws of versification. He accepts the white or black pieces like a chess-expert, and having concluded one game, takes the opposite side of the board and starts another. There is no element of luck in chess, no

such element in the poet. The man comes out of the moves he makes. And he is that formidable opponent who neither accepts nor opposes anybody. He is one of the figures himself. He is neither fate nor free will, chance nor consciousness, environment nor ego, but something of each and all combined, like any other mortal. Emerson found the human world in his Concord walks; Thoreau in Walden; Emily Dickinson in her Amherst garden. Young Robinson found it in Tilbury Town, alias Gardiner, Maine. He did not have to yearn for Greece, Rome and the vanished lands, nor race abroad in the fashion of Longfellow, Lowell, Willis, Taylor, Whistler, James, Pound, Eliot. Sights never add to vision. They are merely an authentification of vision. This globe-trotter was content to do his globe-trotting in the tiny area of his home. The deeper and richer side of his development moves along these lines; the more wayward, abstruse and abstract moves against them. Robinson, all through his career, is most at home in Tilbury, and one reader at least is most at home with him there. It is hard for this reader to reconcile Camelot with Tilbury, or with the larger Tilbury, New York. And yet, we shall see that the later Camelot is not Arthurian, Tennysonian, Swinburnian, Wagnerian, but Robinsonian. The reader will have to admit again that Robinson is a tough opponent and let his yearning for more Tilbury and less Camelot fall before the Yankee's determination to make of Camelot another Tilbury and of Tilbury another Camelot.

In Robinson's second book, we come to longer Tilbury poems, "Captain Craig," "Isaac And Archibald," "The Book Of Annandale," to further triumphs over the sonnet, to further ballads, "Sainte Nitouche" and "The Field Of Glory," and to the exquisite variations on Greek themes. His excursion into the Greek anthology must have trained his genius for the epigram, an accomplishment he shares with Emerson and Dickinson. His epigrams are colder, harder, more finished than theirs. And his mastery of the form emerges in poems made up of a series of perfect quatrains, and in the conclusions to sonnets and ballads. He overplays the part at times. The reader who is

heartily familiar with Robinson can almost anticipate the trick and conclude the plot of a poem himself. It is again the vice of the virtue carried too far. "Lais To Aphrodite," adapted from the poet Plato, is clean-cut, and the final couplet typical of Robinson's favorite device.

> When I, poor Lais, with my crown
> Of beauty could laugh Hellas down,
> Young lovers crowded at my door,
> Where now my lovers come no more.
>
> So, Goddess, you will not refuse
> A mirror that has now no use;
> For what I was I cannot be,
> And what I am I will not see.

Robinson is deeply versed in womanly beauty, the arts of beauty, the subtle relations and irrelations of woman and her mate. As a rule, his dramatic eye is intent on the aftermath of love and beauty, on the struggle of two to remain one in the face of estrangement. His love poems are rich in material for the historian of Amor, and again for the playwright and novelist. Though Robinson is never so ardent as Browning or Meredith, he is the peer of those romantic masters in the realm of elusive womanhood. His very restraint is all the more effective in limning relations in the round. In this he resembles Henry James, the shadowy master of the social novel. The poet has an advantage in telling the same tale in fewer lines, plus the seduction of a musical metric. For this reason, one reader prefers the Robinson of the shorter poems to the Robinson of the major narratives. The shorter poems have the power of evoking all the ramifications of a given relation. If he is sensitive and mellow enough, the reader can go on complete journeys of his own incited by just a few stanzas. Robinson, like Browning, is a portrait painter as well as philosopher and musician. Though the portraits are usually cameos, daguerreotypes, etchings, and the sitters rarely sit still, the onlooker can see the whole spirit at once and reconstruct through his own experience, the lives of the sitters. As there are always two or more figures in dynamic juxtaposition, one is able to see one's own relation to

mankind, back to the tragic differences the children of Adam inherited in Eden. In this most human of problems, "Captain Craig," like "The Children Of The Night," is a tentative volume. The richer canvases are still to come. But the double sonnets, "The Growth of 'Lorraine,' " and "The Woman And The Wife," are complete hints in themselves. The former is embryonic of T. S. Eliot's famous narrative, "Portrait Of A Lady." In Robinson's poem, the lady commits suicide; in Eliot's she goes on waiting for the man to return. In "The Woman And The Wife," a self-explanatory title, one feels the death of romantic love in the abyss across which the wife attacks her husband:

> "What is it worth to-night that you can see
> More marriage in the dream of one dead kiss
> Than in a thousand years of life like this?
> Passion has turned the lock, Pride keeps the key."

The Robinson heroines throughout speak more directly than the heroes. The men fumble about; are haunted by doubts and dreads; still cling to illusion; are immature compared with the women. If Robinson's portraits are true, one is ruefully tempted to agree with the Turkish Sultan who declared that he would rather be any man than an American. In the arts of love, the American is still as primitive as he is in the social arts. To this might be joined the consolatory corollary, that once Eve is aroused anywhere, she is a tempest against which any mere son of Adam is as helpless as the old man himself. Nature, savage and self-centred, adds her arts to the arts of her female offspring in conquering the childish dolt who is endowed with every implement of warfare, save that of love. His genius for evasion avails him not. The civilized male, glorious product of modern science and the nonpareil reason, is as much a slave and nincompoop—in America at least—as his simpler, more sentimental progenitors. In Shaw's "Man And Superman," woman, not man, is the pursuer. How horrified we were when first we saw that play. And, in the Robinsonian sonnet which has provoked these reflections, it is the wife who wields

the weapon of scientific truth. It is no subtle rapier, but a forthright battle-axe: "Do you ask me to take moonlight for the sun?"

Modern novels and plays have been devoted to the tragic little plot to which the poet brings but twenty-eight lines. He will return to the plot again and again, with the women growing more and more compelling and the men paler and feebler. Even the heroic Tristram will seem a stuttering puppet in the presence of the passionate Isolt or of Isolt of the White Hands. Robinsonian males are hard for proud men to read about. Most of the women are the devils to whom the serpent handed the apple of knowledge. Robinson's devils, like Milton's, are more appealing than his Puritans. Here once more, we encounter the eccentric note of New England literature. And, in his approach to the heart of Puritanism and its great god of faith, we cannot ascertain the poet's own faith. If he has faith, it is tinged with irony or skepticism—a sturdy compound withal. For any one indoor schism, he has as little use as Emerson: the sonnet on Erasmus closes on a droll Yankee cadence:

> Good fathers looked askance at him and rolled
> Their inward eyes in anguish and affright;
> There were some of them did shake at what was told,
> And they shook best who knew that he was right.

Robinson's humor, a blending of tragedy and comedy, also hovers over longer poems like "Captain Craig" and "Isaac And Archibald." These pathetic old relics, each with his valiant pride, are among the most moving figures in the Tilbury gallery. Captain Craig, unique though he is, grows a little too garrulous. The poet, who was doubtless one of the "five or six who let him talk," let him talk too long in the poem. Isaac and Archibald are more reasonable. They contrive, with the aid of the poet's boyhood memories, to compose a warm American narrative. The old friends are growing aged, but neither will confess it to the worshipful boy. Each regales him with gossip claiming that the other fellow is the old fellow of the two. These antique Yankees are the human divinities of any rural

land, and the boy is the immortal boy who mingles with the old and keeps them from growing older.

"The Town Down The River," dedicated to Roosevelt, opens with the memorable portrait of Lincoln. Composed in Robinson's favorite octosyllabics, the poem assumes a position "not long after the Civil War," when those who had formerly jeered the woodsman turned to hero-worshipers. The hasty attacks on the early Lincoln were typical of the superficiality of the youthful nation in every direction. Confronted by a new, racy individual, we are prone to thrust him aside for some one more obvious, more immediate, more sensational. One may apply Robinson's poem to the literary world and discover that the greater literary figures, almost without exception, have had to wait for posterity to measure them properly. Even now, the popular pastime of the average intellectual, that creature without a heart or head, is a perpetual impatience with contemporary America. He is always looking for the man who has not yet arrived; meanwhile the man, and still better, the man in several numbers and qualities, is already here. I have a notion that the much-maligned public is usually ahead of the intellectual in this respect and hails its leaders without the supposed advantages of an enlightened criticism. I mean, of course, people who are closest to the soil and the problems of the race. These, and not the cognoscenti, are the truly cultivated people. Intellectuals failed to recognize the early Lincoln, just as they failed to welcome the early Robinson. Whether the poet had himself in mind or not, his Lincoln is a symbolical portrait.

His third book contains additional Tilbury studies: "Calverley's," "Leffingwell," "Clavering," "Lingard," "Uncle Ananias," "Leonora," "Doctor Of Billiards," "Shadrach O'Leary," "Atherton's Gambit," "Momus" and the inimitable "Miniver Cheevy." Miniver yearns for the days of old, "Thebes and Camelot," and for the Medici, "albeit he had never seen one." The last stanza links Miniver with the long line of men who take to philosophy and drink: a delightful gallery headed by Lord Shakespeare and closed by the irresistible Eben Flood. Not long ago, Robinson registered an attack on the Eighteenth Amendment. For the

sake of such fellows as Miniver, Mr. Flood and the immortal William, one sides with him. "Doctor Of Billiards" has a personal touch when we know that the poet is an adept at the game. The "three spheres of insidious ivory" that make a life vain must refer to Peterboro poets who have tried to remove the Robinson crown in billiards. Herbert Spencer came to grief trying to defeat a better player than himself and, in ungentlemanly fashion, referred to the wasted life of his opponent. The present sonnet comes to a like conclusion; but I am sure the poet's love of the game sharpens his aptitude for the games of life, science and art. We come next to the most mature of Robinson's books so far, a book he has never surpassed: "The Man Against The Sky."

Here we have "Flammonde," gentleman, castaway, friend and adviser; "The Gift Of God," where the devotion of a mother to a commonplace son is raised to a blind stateliness; and "Cassandra," one of Robinson's attacks on native materialism. And here is the rollicking ballad, "John Gorham," a tragic dialogue in which lovers rail at each other across their estrangement:

> "And I dare say all this moonlight lying round us might as well
> Fall for nothing on the shards of broken urns that are forgotten;
> As on two that have no longer much of anything to tell."

For once, the Robinsonian male holds his own with his antagonist, and even has the last word. There are other love lyrics and ballads: "Eros Turannos," "The Unforgiven," "Veteran Sirens," "Another Dark Lady," "Llewelyn And The Tree." In the first, with its aftermath of love in marriage, the woman cannot let the man go, though she finds him a Judas. "The Unforgiven" describes another "fireside farce," and a "drama of hard words unspoken" where "she, the unforgiving, hates him more for her lack than for her loss." There are no happy marriages in Robinson. The poems suffer from several rather obvious statements: the type of cliché through which a bachelor eyes a wedded man and draws a hasty conclusion. The really profound, all-sided poem about marriage has yet to be written by an American. Perhaps it could only be written by some

happily married fellow. If he find his life so complete that art cannot add a tittle, the poem will remain unwritten.

In "Llewelyn And The Tree," the man is goaded by his wife "for what God left out"—a penetrating phrase. One fine day,

> Priscilla, warmer than her name,
> And shriller than the sound of saws,
> Pursued Llewelyn once too far,
> Not knowing quite the man he was.

Llewelyn treads the primrose path because of his wife's tongue. Twenty years later, the poet meets him on Broadway and notes that the "worn satiric eyes had something of immortal youth." "Another Dark Lady" is a Petrarchan sonnet in the manner of Miss Millay turn-about-face:

> Think not, because I wonder where you fled,
> That I would lift a pin to see you there;
> You may, for me, be prowling anywhere,
> So long as you show not your little head.

The word, prowling, catches the predatory instincts of the Robinsonian female, an instinct tinged with tragedy in the totally different ballad, "Veteran Sirens." This echoes "Lais To Aphrodite." The ghost of the celebrated Ninon, who lured lovers to her feet on the edge of the grave, is invoked in behalf of her descendants:

> So brave and so alert for learning how
> To fence with reason for another year.

These exquisite lines are matched by the following:

> Although they suffer, they may not forswear
> The patient ardor of the unpursued.

The profound pity of Robinson is finally bared in the pitiless cadences:

> Poor flesh, to fight the calendar so long;
> Poor vanity, so quaint and yet so brave;
> Poor folly, so deceived and yet so strong,
> So far from Ninon and so near the grave.

To the gallery of brave derelicts, the poet has added "Bewick Finzer," "Bokardo," "Old King Cole," "The Poor Relation." Poor Finzer, who "drew the breath of six per cent" on his half million, is wrecked by Wall Street and "comes unfailing for the loan we give and then forget." Bokardo, who has tried suicide and may try it again, is soothed by the garrulity of the poet he visits, a garrulity, no doubt, the host puts on to distract his guest from introspection. Old King Cole is another lover of the pre-Prohibition bowl. Reduced to "two disastrous heirs" who "made more music than ever three did," Cole talks so long that he talks his confidant asleep. Of all the wastrels, relics and frustrates, "The Poor Relation" is the most poignant. Here one slowly sees the drooping features and manners of that universal figure, the relative reduced to living on her nearest of kin. The portrait is Rembrandtian: Robinson never wrote a finer ballad. One is tempted to call the two long poems of the volume the best long poems he has ever written: "Ben Jonson Entertains A Man From Stratford" and "The Man Against The Sky." Though the former is Elizabethan and approaches Shakespeare and Jonson through the dramatic monology of Browning, the unfolding story is native to Robinson's philosophy. English critics, so slow to hail him and so hostile to most of his work, consider the poem the finest portrait of Shakespeare in poetry.

Ben is entertaining a neighbor of the Bard's, a mere alderman and yet a man of title, at a time when Shakespeare is in his decline and, heartily sick of London and the temporal triumphs of the stage, longs to turn his hoarded shillings into a house in Stratford, so that he, a servant of kings, may rise to comparative royalty in his childhood home. The Bard can see through the vanity of kings and see through his own, but cannot resist the teasing image of his "dukedom down in Warwickshire." The arguments between Ben and William, with which Jonson regales the alderman, are superbly handled. The scholarly Ben cannot dispel the mumbling gloom of the tragic genius of the countryside. The following singing irony sums up the Shake-

spearean philosophy—and the Robinsonian. The Bard is addressing Jonson:

> "Your fly will serve as well as anybody,
> And what's his hour? He flies, and flies, and flies,
> And in his fly's mind has a brave appearance;
> And then your spider gets him in her net,
> And eats him out, and hangs him up to dry.
> That's Nature, the kind mother of us all.
> And then your slattern housemaid swings her broom,
> And where's your spider? And that's Nature, also.
> It's Nature, and it's Nothing. It's all Nothing.
> It's all a world where bugs and emperors
> Go singularly back to the same dust,
> Each in his time; and the old, ordered stars
> That sang together, Ben, will sing the same
> Old stave to-morrow."

This is also the modern view, ushered in by science and the dimming of faith, and deepened by the aftermath of disillusion created by the World War. When we arrive at the youngest generation, which has hitched its elegiac wagon to Eliot's "Waste Land," we shall see a further development of the chaotic motive. Jonson tells the alderman:

> When he talks like that,
> There's nothing for a human man to do
> But lead him to some grateful nook like this
> Where we be now, and then to make him drink.

There is no catharsis for the Bard but to cling to the illusory shillings and the illusory house they may build—"O Lord, that House in Stratford!"

Here again is Robinson's art in disclosing the tragedy inherent in greatness, a theme we can trace from the earliest books down through the glories and destruction of Camelot. In "The Man Against The Sky," a purely philosophic poem in irregular metrics, we behold an idealist up on the heights at sunset, "like a dome against the glory of a world on fire." This narrative is a forerunner of the Camelot narratives. It suffers, like them, from a too rarefied obscurity, an attempt to leave nothing unsaid, and to say that through the subtlest refinement of mood,

thought and image. But the body of the poem is so remarkable as to be worthy of several readings, each of which will unfold deeper meanings and loftier delights. The man we see takes the harder path upward in the face of tempting valleys around him. Though his high quest come to naught, the quest, like the quest in Camelot, is everything and defeat inevitable. The Transcendental faith handed down to the youthful Robinson is no longer impeccable. It has taken a darker, more puzzled track. None the less, though science may have proven, by the latest count, that the earth is three thousand million years old, and that planets as well as races are infinitesimal, one reader still believes in the human race. It may be as atomic as scientists confidently paint it; yet it seems to me worthy of the faith once implanted in the gods created by the prayers of successive generations. We have read about the twilight and decline of many old gods of the Orient, of Greece, of Rome, of the Nibelungen; and Christianity is on the verge of similar dissolution. In the crumbling of faiths before the heroic invasion of scientific reasoning, even the faith in man has been expelled, save in philosophic poets like Robinson. It is not necessary to raise man to godhood and worship him in turn. But since the whole study of creation is a study, not of the intangible gods of the beyond, but of the constantly changing attitude of man toward life and the grave, it has always been Man, not God, we see in the workings of the human imagination. Subjective or objective, he is the most fascinating animal on earth, and the only one we know intimately, brothers that we are in the wanderings of his eternally restless spirit. It is idle to say that man has lost his own faith. Belief has another light, another shade, is a little more human than ever before. And none more human than the geologist counting his three thousand million years of earth. What a good time his heart must have with so many. And there is still "to-morrow and to-morrow and to-morrow" for somebody else to play with.

In the two years before "The Man Against The Sky" appeared, Robinson issued the psychological plays, "Van Zorn" and "The Porcupine." In 1917 came the first and finest of the

Arthurian legends: "Merlin." "Lancelot" followed three years later and "Tristram" seven years after Lancelot. Next to these old narratives stand the modern narratives: "Avon's Harvest," "Roman Bartholow," "The Man Who Died Twice," "Cavender's House." Before considering them as a whole, I have to confess to a preference for the poet's shorter narratives and romances. In comparing the longer and shorter works, one is inclined to accept Poe's diatribe against the epic form. But in view of the sustained flight of Miss Branch's "Nimrod," and of those parts in the Robinsonian tales which are equally successful, one could argue the matter with Poe. One does not object to the revival of the Arthurian legends. Robinson, like Hovey, has made them his own, and plays upon the old themes with the subtle instrumentation of a modern psychologist. But this very finesse in the realm of the psyche retards the dramatist which the poet happens to be in the shorter romances. A long narrative requires more than an insight into human beings and a setting forth of the lights and shades of their relations. Robinson has expended the gamut of his delicate equipment in analyzing human nature. He takes the people apart down to the last detail and puts them together again in a perfect synthesis. In this process, the characters aid the dramatist. They speak his language; analyze themselves at great length; play into his hands like puppets of his own theories of love and life. They have emotions and passions, but even these are diluted with thinking and talking aloud, with long gray reveries. Many of their dialogues are extensions of monologues on the part of the hidden author. These factors have magic qualities in themselves. Considered in relation to the whole plot, they are parts of a conscious intellectual scheme lacking in theatre, and tending to an ultimate monotony. There is no continuous passionate drive on the part of author or characters. The poems lack that overwhelming power which carries the reader along in an unconscious state. He is reminded too often of the restrained methods of the dramatist. The poems have beauty, movement, poignancy and a certain amount of differentiation. But they in-

clude too much of the theoretical Robinson. They explain their own workings too obviously, and re-explain these workings long after their acceptance by the reader. How one yearns at times for terse thrusts and ripostes among the characters; for sharp direction instead of the almost perpetual indirection, in which the effort to avoid banalities leads to involved digressions. The men, in especial, suffer from abstract profusion, but so do the more forthright, more impassioned Vivian, Guinevere, Isolt. In the extended love duels, the men come off second best, for Merlin, Lancelot and Tristram are Robinsonian Americans of the intellectual class. So are the men of the modern narratives. They are all failures and frustrates, and employ the measured accents of a noble defeatism.

The blank verse they talk is a perfect instrument in the hands of the poet, but one longs to put it in the mouths of the characters. Bernard Shaw has fallen into similar errors in the field of prose comedy. The guiding principle of an author should be apparent in a play or dramatic poem, but only after the play, not during the course of action. Not alone do the narratives lack the full effect of a passionate drive; sensual elements are usually in a minimum. Even when lovers are swept into each other's arms, they are swept there by a series of beautifully cadenced speeches. They are much too often a pair of intellectuals, and all too seldom the downright, divine animals who people the earth with further people. The lovers are usually esoteric, and they are esoteric mainly because the problem between them rises out of that state of aftermath so popular with the poet from the outset. One would like to see the beginning of a love affair. And then its apogee and eclipse. We have to take the beginning for granted, or let the author rehearse it in the course of the later action. In so doing, he plays the expositionist at a time we crave action, more action. One wishes he would descend for awhile into those dime-novels hearsay tells us he is fond of reading. He even went so far as to call "Avon's Harvest" a metrical dime-novel. "It is," Mark Van Doren declares with relief, "no such thing"—but I cannot share the

critic's relief. The classic dramatists never disregarded melodrama. The plots of Æschylus, Sophocles, Euripedes, fairly swoon with gorgeous blood and thunder. So do the great dramatists of Elizabeth's reign. And the greatest of them all never forgot the yokels and buffoons of his time. His theatre, like any theatre, was composed of all classes. Had he disdained the barbarous taste of his butchers and bakers, his theatre would have been ruined. There are clowns in Robinson, but how intellectual they are alongside Bottom, the weaver, and the long line of delightful idiots who save kings from boredom. Van Doren is assured that Robinson's fame could never have rested on his earlier volumes, that his long narratives are certain to bring him the title of major poet. I wish I could share so hearty a conviction. I think it unfair to Robinson. It forces his epics into a comparative field with Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, Milton, Goethe. It would be better to call him, if we have to call him names, a major-minor poet in the narratives and a major lyrist in the shorter poems. Better still, let us call him Robinson. That, after all, is sufficient. I do not wish to discourage a reading of the narratives. They should be read, and read often. They contain some of the most beautiful passages, the subtlest characterization, the profoundest psychology and philosophy, in American literature. Robinson, like "The Man Against The Sky," attempted the highest peaks prompted by the determined ideals of the creative spirit. It may be that one of his truest admirers has been unable to follow him there, and has had to fall back to the apparently easier demands of the shorter poems. To these I retreat again, content to conclude this comment with a reference to the minor note in the remaining volumes: "The Three Taverns," "Dionysus In Doubt" and the shorter poems of "Avon's Harvest."

Here we find such memorable pieces as "Demos," "The False Gods," "Tasker Norcruss," "Souvenir," "The Rat," "Nimmo," "Mr. Flood's Party," "Vain Gratuities," "The Long Race," "Many Are Called," "Inferential," "The Mill," "The Dark Hills," "The Sheaves," and still others. Here we find the sure eye and ear of the earlier Robinson moving along their mature

way. One need not discuss the too many, too varied poems in detail. In a mood of self-defense, one might quote the democratic conclusion of "Inferential":

> "Never mind;
> If some of us were not so far behind,
> The rest of us were not so far ahead."

Or one may appeal to Robinson's verdict on the many who are called by the Lord Apollo:

> And though melodious multitudes have tried
> In ecstasy, in anguish, and in vain,
> With invocation sacred and profane
> To lure him, even the loudest are outside.

But this is too uncomfortable a note on which to close. One prefers to take recourse, in these thirsty days, to the serene forgetfulness Robinson holds out to so many tragic failures—not alone to the immortal failure, Squire Shakespeare, but to the most intimate derelict of Tilbury Town: old Eben Flood. The homeless Mr. Flood, alone on the hill above Tilbury, "where strangers would have shut the many doors that many friends had opened long ago," holds a party with himself and a bottle, and the bottle, tilted once too often, causes him to see two beings in himself. These shadowy fellows begin one of the most endearing debates on record. One verse ought to be enough to test the lofty beverage inside the belly of the bottle. Though the only ecstasy I have ever known got its intoxication outside of jugs, Mr. Flood is one of my dearest friends. I know of no flesh and blood creature closer to whatever I happen to be.

> 'Well, Mr. Flood, we have the harvest moon
> Again, and we may not have many more;
> The bird is on the wing, the poet says,
> And you and I have said it here before.
> Drink to the bird." He raised up to the light
> The jug that he had gone so far to fill,
> And answered huskily: "Well, Mr. Flood,
> Since you propose it, I believe I will."

XIX

THE FIRE AND ICE OF ROBERT FROST

The fact is the sweetest dream that labor knows.
Robert Frost.

THOUGH Frost was born in San Francisco, no man is more closely identified with New England soil. The boy who came East at the death of his father, the copperhead politician, was the descendant of eight generations of downeast Frosts. His outward life has been almost as uneventful as Robinson's. He studied and worked in the mill town of Lawrence, Mass., spent a few months at Dartmouth, was happily married at twenty-two, tried learning from books again, this time at Harvard—where, like Robinson, he resigned in two years—and then tried his hand at teaching, shoemaking, editing, farming. Teaching, farming and poetry have clung to him longest. The stubbornness of the Yankee soil in yielding sufficient nutriment for his growing family found a counterpart in the general hostility paid to his poetry by editors. Frost began writing early and slowly. In the course of twenty years, a few poems penetrated magazines, led by *The Independent*. Editors who now clamor for his work were among the first to reject him. His average earnings over two decades were ten dollars per annum. Frost lived in an even deeper cultural wilderness than Robinson's. But the New Hampshire poet was the offspring of a sturdy, quixotic race. In 1912, just as the renascence split the American darkness, Frost sold his farm at Derry, and sailed to England with his wife and four children. For sheer eccentricity, his move deserves the Yankee crown.

In London, he came in touch with remarkable activities in the world of poetry. Pitched camps lay about; poetry was subjected to vital controversy. Harold Monro, the taciturn Scot, had opened his Poetry Bookshop, along with the magazine,

Poetry And Drama. The Egoist also made its radical bow. The Frost family settled in Gloucestershire, near the English poets, W. W. Gibson and Lascelles Abercrombie. Frost met an even more important poet, important to Americans: the redoubtable Ezra Pound. Pound had fled his native land as early as 1908, never, so far, to return. He was soon followed by other "expatriates"—H. D., John Gould Fletcher, T. S. Eliot. Amy Lowell also appeared on the scene and ultimately took over the reins of Imagism. Imagism, born in the capital of the British Empire, was destined to open the civil war in American poetry. Hearsay tells us, when Frost met its leader, the fiery Ezra was correcting the poems of some of his colleagues, and asked the older American whether he had brought a poem to be read. We may assume that Pound revised it and that Frost went home and put it back into its original form. The Yankee remained untouched by the differences among the radicals and academes of the time.

In 1913, David Nutt, the English publisher, issued Frost's first book, "A Boy's Will," and the following year, "North Of Boston." The books won a favorable reception in London. When the Frost family returned to New York, he found himself, at the age of forty, acclaimed at home. Amy Lowell, in a *New Republic* article, was the first to welcome him back. Frost moved to Franconia, N. H., and reverted to farming. The family, farming, people, teaching and poetry—these were his sole concern. His poems went on in a clearly articulated, fully rounded progression. The man is never in a hurry. The Holts brought out his books in New York, to which a third, "Mountain Interval," was added in 1916. The next, "New Hampshire," had to wait seven years, and the most recent, "West-Running Brook," six more.

There had been no noise in giving birth to Robert Frost, and the song of New England—for such his song is—has taken nearly three centuries to reach its present maturity. He had this advantage over most of his contemporaries: he came out of a folk who lived close to the soil and had tilled it over and over. The richest art is the outcome of the longest contact

with primeval earth, of a race devoting its procession of lives to the same plot of ground. Out of such a process, the Yankee folk poets, like the European, had emerged; and the Yankees achieved sophistication in the lad from San Francisco. Frost is a blend of the direct power and subtle sophistication essential to the deepest folk poetry. Nor did he have to go to Burns or Wordsworth, both of whom he resembles, nor to Browning, who taught him the art of the dramatic lyric. He only needed to study his own tradition: Bryant, Emerson, Whittier, Sill. The most he owes anybody he owes to such poets. He owes still more to his people, the neighborly descendants of his neighborly forefathers. One of his characters declares: "I go nowhere on purpose: I happen by." It is a keynote to Frost's nature. He permits things and people to have their own way; he is the recording instrument. The artist appears only after the performance, and he lets the characters take all the bows.

Frost has little or no self-love as an artist. He is much too wise for that. He has knowledge of his people, of all people, and a thorough knowledge of himself. So complete is his self-mastery that his poetry never preaches. He rarely tells a story; he lets it tell itself. He does not tell; he shows. And his showmanship is related to the purest theatre—to the art of the Irish genius, John Synge. Save for one short play in prose, Frost has found a large enough stage on paper, and confines himself to narratives in free blank verse, ballads in human couplets, dramatic lyrics. He has imbued the racial vernacular with a skillfully handled variety of poetic rhythms. Robinson's blank verse is loyally classical; Frost's is casual, democratic, Yankee. But these men of the wilderness are related in the profounder ways of life. It is absurd to follow the popular pastime of placing one above the other. Though Robinson has written a great deal more, and has attempted the more ambitious forms, he is not as confidential as Frost, not so close to the reader. Robinson is more intellectual, Frost more intuitive. But "Tilbury" is fully as real as "North Of Boston." Both men are fascinated by the failures of their race. Though Robinson, on the whole, is more concerned with civilized people and his mind ranges

over all lands, he is not more universal than his rival. Comparisons between the pair are an endless temptation. Each has his own values, and the richest reader is the one who takes them for what they are.

In viewing the wilderness in which these men felt their way, one consults a poem by Frost whose meaning, apparently, has escaped the critics so far: "Our Singing Strength." This poem, while describing a snowstorm in spring, is symbolical of the wintry conditions American poets have had to contend with throughout our history. The long New England winter, attacking the belated spring with snow, cannot drive off all the birds that have flown up from the South.

> Some that have come too far north back away;
> Really a very few to build and stay.

Behind the sheer reticence of that couplet, one can feel the heroic struggle of our artists. One feels it further in the description of the wintry road to which the birds were reduced:

> So then they let their lives be narrowed in
> By thousands the bad weather made akin.

With a quiet gesture, compact of ironic detachment and a clear recognition of the values to be won from suffering, the poet concludes:

> Well, something for a snowstorm to have shown
> The country's singing strength thus brought together,
> That though depressed and moody with the weather,
> Was none the less there ready to be freed
> And sing the wild flowers up from root and seed.

This is not a piece of shoddy American optimism, but a serene statement of the facts of existence in any society, however advanced. The reaction of our average intellectual is well known. Constantly at odds with his home, he hates it, flays it, and flees to Europe or the isolated comforts of an ivory tower. The real, rare artist is a lusty fellow who cannot be chilled by dumb neighbors, nor frustrated by the hell of earning a beastly living. Frost's kinship with the other snowstorm solitaries must have

fortified his faith in himself. A salient feature of the early days of the renascence was the joy felt by poets in greeting the other fellow's song, however different from his own. Antagonism bred of temperamental differences stimulated his own independence. To a recent intellectual who propounded the skeptical query: "Has American life made room for poetry?" the answer is clear: "Yes, because it has had to." The song of Robert Frost is one of the reasons for the confident rejoinder. Twenty wintry seasons in spring had failed to subdue or alter the warm, wise course of the man. Nor did moribund New England, with its deserted farms and broken or stunted people, impress him with total tragedy. His love of New England Nature and her people is too rich for pessimistic deductions. True to an ear which listens to speech and lets us hear it through him, Frost is the selective medium of his race. Though an occasional line may sound like his, it is theirs too, as it is also the property of the whole human race. A. R. Orage once blandly dubbed this poetry, "dialect verse." If this is dialect verse, so is Burns', Synge's, Wordsworth's.

"A Boy's Will" is an introductory volume. It owes its title, but nothing else, to Longfellow. Frost bound these youthful poems, published in his thirty-eighth year, with a running commentary of subjective notes. Compared with the lyrical stature of "Mountain Interval," "A Boy's Will" sounds tentative. But it contains characteristic pieces: "Ghost House," "My November Guest," "Storm Fear," "Mowing," "Going For Water," "Revelation," "The Tuft Of Flowers," "Reluctance." There are lines and stanzas no one but Frost could have written. "It costs no inward struggle not to go." "The fact is the sweetest dream that labor knows." "So all who hide too well away must speak and tell us where they are." Here is that curious magic of the thing or thought half hidden, half revealed, touching reality with overtones. Kinship with laborers comes through in the final couplet of "The Tuft Of Flowers."

> "Men work together," I told him from the heart,
> "Whether they work together or apart."

Frost had discovered his own idiom, but not yet perfected it. Here and there, a moral is superimposed. Later, it is always implied.

In "North Of Boston," the full originality of the man is sounded, and sounded in the lyric, narrative and dialogue vein. Most of the narratives gain their unique power through dialogues pregnant with native speech and its connotations. The hidden poet sets and changes the scenes with a restraint so skillful as to show the intimate interplay of Nature and man. Frost's New England is no longer the primeval land of Bryant, nor the fruitful domicile of Whittier. The soil is poor; it has been deserted, as Richard Burton disclosed, for Western lands and populous cities. And the old spirit has grown conservative. An old neighbor of Frost's holds him back with: "Good fences make good neighbors." The younger man, teeming with the sap of spring—"Spring is the mischief in me"—would like to undermine his traditional friend:

> "Before I built a wall I'd ask to know
> What I was walling in or walling out,
> And to whom I was like to give offence.
> Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
> That wants it down."

The "old-stone savage" goes on with his ancestral task, and the poet-farmer comments:

> He moves in darkness as it seems to me,
> Not of words only and the shade of trees.

How clearly this understatement completes the portrait of Frost's antithesis. Nor does the image depart from the scene for its metaphor. In the midst of the casual speech, many of the poet's lines are quotable. In the finest sense, he is the most quotable of moderns: his single lines or pairs catch the essence of a truth and transcend the actual by an appeal to the imagination. The careless-looking lines contain double meanings. They come on us unaware, with an elfin humor delicately Yankee. Never dragged in for effect, they move along in the go-as-you-please blank verse. How close this is to an indigenous

pace and language. It cannot be scanned by academic foot rules. Often the metre deviates from the classic iambic pentameter. But who can measure a poet's art by counting his syllables? Such a scientist would have to resign "The Death Of The Hired Man" after the first line, with its thirteen syllables, half dozen accents and feminine ending. Nor are there any glories of rhetoric here, nor high-sounding flights. Only a wife greeting her husband with the news that "Silas is back."

The news falls on hostile ears. Mary pleads with Warren to take the old man back; Warren determines to be rid of him for good. They argue outdoors on the porch; Silas is off-stage, asleep at the kitchen stove. Warren, knowing his wiles, demands whether he has returned with the old dodge of "ditching the meadow for me." "Surely," Mary retorts, "you wouldn't grudge the poor old man some humble way to save his self-respect." She had found him "huddled against the barn-door fast asleep," and, trying to get him to talk, had been impressed with his plan "to clear the upper pasture, too," and to call in young Harold Wilson to help him. They had worked together for Warren before, arguing over the haying, "Harold's young college boy's assurance" having piqued the old man's rural pride. Poor Silas could only "think of the right thing to say too late." His ambition now is to teach the lad how to build a load of hay—Silas' one accomplishment, Warren admits. Mary concludes:

> "He hates to see a boy the fool of books.
> Poor Silas, so concerned for other folk,
> And nothing to look backward to with pride,
> And nothing to look forward to with hope,
> So now and never any different."

Here, the first silence, the first note of Nature enters. "Part of a moon was falling down the west." She spreads her apron to it. Subtle tenderness is wrought in Warren. But when she tells him Silas "has come home to die," the word, home, evokes gentle mockery. Warren reminds her of Silas' brother, "thirteen little miles away," who is rich, "a somebody—director in

the bank." Silas has never mentioned him; there must be something between them: a matter of pride, Mary claims:

> "He don't know why he isn't quite as good
> As anyone. He won't be made ashamed
> To please his brother, worthless though he is."

Warren admits Si could never hurt anyone, to which she replies:

> "No, but he hurt my heart the way he lay
> And rolled his old head on that sharp-edged chair-back."

She knows his "working days are done," but insists Warren must go in and see him.

> "He has a plan. You mustn't laugh at him.
> He may not speak of it, and then he may.
> I'll sit and see if that small sailing cloud
> Will hit or miss the moon."

Warren goes. The cloud hits the moon, and at the height of the exquisite note,

> Warren returned—too soon, it seemed to her,
> Slipped to her side, caught up her hand and waited.
> "Warren," she questioned.
> "Dead," was all he answered.

There is no need to analyze the artistry of this poem: the sudden entrance of delicate inner rhymes, the melting of the moon and home motives, the final solitary monosyllable. "The Death Of The Hired Man" ushered in a new movement in our literature: in stories, novels and plays, as well as in poetry. The renascence in fiction and drama owes part of its advance to the pioneer effort of Robert Frost.

In "The Mountain," the poet encounters an old figure "who moved so slow . . . it seemed no harm to stop him altogether." He is typical of people who live so long in one place, they are immune to its attractions. This gaffer has never climbed to the top of Mt. Hor over Lunenberg. Hearsay is the only information he can give his interlocutor. As to a lake somewhere up there, he answers in the manner of the poet himself:

"I don't suppose the water's changed at all.
You and I know enough to know it's warm
Compared with cold, and cold compared with warm.
But all the fun's in how you say a thing—"

another way of saying, the style is the man. "A Hundred Collars" is a fantastic tale—whimsical only to those who do not know their Yankees. A teacher finds himself in a town with but one hotel, and has to put up in a room with an eccentric drunkard named Lafe. The teacher, ushered in by the clerk, is greeted with

"Show him this way. I'm not afraid of him.
I'm not so drunk I can't take care of myself."

The note of incipient horror is developed. Lafe is "a brute, naked above the waist . . . fumbling the buttons in a large-sized shirt." He has grown so stout, he now needs a number eighteen shirt, and, demanding the teacher's size, is answered: "Oh—ah—fourteen—fourteen." Lafe recollects he once wore fourteen and has more than a hundred collars the professor is welcome to. But the professor is too scared to accept the offer. Of the other comedies, "Blueberries," "The Code" and "The Generations Of Men" have a varied appeal. "Blueberries," in a Browningesque ballad form, has that accuracy of epithet which brings New England so close to the reader. Though the idiom is personal, the experience is so universal as to make the reader wonder why he missed telling it himself, and telling it just so. "After Apple-Picking" and "The Wood-Pile" belong to a similar category. The landscape is never described for its own sake; nor are the human records, coloring the landscape, merely of interest because of their country character. The natural order of things and comments, the delicious connotations, the essential humanness and seemingly careless music contribute to a concentrated intensity.

"The Generations Of Men" is one of Frost's love stories, if anything so subtly unveiled can be called a love story. A host of people named Stark gather in the village of Bow to celebrate a tribal reunion. Among those who have never met before

are two young people who meet by accident, talk of the weather, and discover their kinship. There is some inconsequential gossip about the family—"What will we come to with all this pride of ancestry, we Yankees?" Little by little, the objective grows subjective, the impersonal personal, faintly personal. The cousins appoint a meeting for tomorrow, rain or shine, in the same place—and there the tale ends.

"Home Burial," "The Black Cottage," "A Servant To Servants," "The Housekeeper," "The Fear," "The Self-Seeker," are related in tragedy, almost noiseless tragedy, to "The Death Of The Hired Man." Again we are near the heart of folk dramas, and behold the remnants of an old race reduced to the shadows of twilight and death. In "Home Burial," a man has buried his own child behind his own house. His wife, haunted by the mound's proximity, upbraids him with the act. A tortured scene ensues. "A man must partly give up being a man with womenfolk," he declares in his puzzled misery. Nothing he says can bring her back to him. She breaks down and cries. "The heart's gone out of it: why keep it up," he begs, but Amy runs from the house, and her husband after her. "The Black Cottage" is an empty relic of the Civil War—the family having deserted it. Otherwise, it remains as it was before its master was killed and its mistress died of the slow poison of loneliness. A minister is showing the poet through the place. He recalls the old lady in her pew, "with her old tremulous bonnet," and the great care he took not to disillusion her faith in the ancient tenets of the church. He was most careful not to remove hellfire from the service: she would have missed it, whereas "our liberal youth" are against it. An observation follows whose application is universal to men swinging back and forth between conservatism and romanticism. It applies even to poetry movements:

> "I'm just as glad she made me keep hands off
> For, dear me, why abandon a belief
> Merely because it ceases to be true.
> Cling to it long enough, and not a doubt
> It will turn true again, for so it goes.

Most of the change we think we see in life
Is due to truths being in and out of favour."

"A Servant To Servants" is a poignant study of the female problem, of the woman weary from "cooking meals for hungry hired men . . . from doing things over and over that just won't stay done." There has been insanity in her family; she feels it stealing over her. Toward the close, we hear implications of terror, especially in the last line:

"There's work enough to do—there's always that;
But behind's behind. The worst that you can do
Is set me back a little more behind.
I shan't catch up in this world, anyway.
I'd *rather* you'd not go unless you must."

"The Housekeeper" is a tale of the estrangement of two who have lived together without benefit of clergy. The girl, no longer a girl, has run away to marry some one else. The portrait of the housekeeper, mother of the girl, is superb, as is the portrait of the helplessly pathetic old John, who is left on her hands. "The Fear" is another tale of estrangement: of the woman who has taken up with another man. She is in constant dread of the return of the first man and of what he may do. She is always seeing apparitions. One night, under lantern light, the apparition comes true, leading a boy by the hand. The ending is rather abrupt and vague. "The Self-Seeker" reveals a man who has been crippled for life and is waiting for the five hundred dollars his company will settle on him. He finds contentment in the flowers he has raised, and in the friendship of a little girl he has trained to leave flowers in their place.

"Anne has a way with flowers to take the place
Of that she's lost: she goes down on one knee
And lifts their faces by the chin to hers
And says their names, and leaves them where they are."

After "North Of Boston," the books of Robert Frost contain fewer narratives and an increasing number of lyrics and portraits. There are only three narratives in "Mountain Interval," but two of these, "In The Home Stretch" and "Snow" are

distinguished. In the former, a couple on the downgrade in years try to resuscitate their hold on life and each other by moving into the country and taking a farm. We see them at that worst of times, moving time, with the men clomping in and out, dumping things anywhere. Any hope about farm-life to be had from these country movers is dispelled by their contempt for farms. The man takes an optimistic view of present and future; the woman is a downright realist. This move is not the beginning of something new. They are still in the middle of things—"there are only middles."

> "New is a word for fools in towns who think
> Style upon style in dress and thought at last
> Must get somewhere."

Joe, true to the romantic tradition of the male, wants to take her for a "good-night call" on the orchard, but the woman drives the "drunk-nonsensical tired" fellow to bed. The concluding lines interpret the human situation through the medium of insensate things:

> When there was no more lantern in the kitchen,
> The fire got out through crannies in the stove
> And danced in yellow wrigglers on the ceiling,
> As much at home as if they'd always danced there.

The narrative, "Snow," belongs to long housed-in winters and to the noble tradition of Bryant, Emerson and Whittier. Frost's poem is the finest of snow-poems since "Snow-Bound." Though we never leave the indoor scene, the great white world is felt in every line.

The lyrics alone entitle Frost to a high place in our poetry. Each has a unique fascination. The author is present throughout, but we cannot quite get hold of the fellow. He is the most intimate and wayward of men, the most forthright and elusive.

> Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
> I took the one less traveled by,
> And that has made all the difference.

This bears the stamp of the individual common to all races. If the poem is rebellious, it is tempered with the wisdom of Emerson, father of rebels. A lyric of Frost's is about as objective as a lyric can be; the poet analyzes his moods dispassionately. But the heart of the quiet stanzas beats with passion and reality. The surface may be cool and casual, the language restrained, the accent fairly regular, but the effect is overpowering. It stirs the blood of the reader and carries him off, emotionally and wisely. The kinship Frost feels with his fellows is a more accurate democracy than Whitman's. Walt seems at times a little too theoretical, too tumultuous, too self-centred. Nor does the word, democracy, appear in Frost. He is suspicious of terms and terminology, and abhors the grandiose. He is too subtle an artist to define anything or anybody conclusively. He leaves something to the reader, something the reader can add to out of his own experience. Turn to the other lyrics and portraits and there is always at least one line to set us going. The sonnet on "The Oven Bird" closes on a note of creative resignation:

> The question that he frames in all but words
> Is what to make of a diminished thing.

"Birches," a swinging rehearsal of the poet's boyhood, breaks into the lines: "Earth's the right place for love: I don't know where it's likely to go better." In a sonnet, "Putting In The Seed," he is "slave to a springtime passion for the earth." "The Cow In Apple Time" runs wild with a similar fire, makes "no more of a wall than an open gate." Love, never uttered too loud, never obviously defined; love, the container of all, down to its bedfellow, hate; love, the wise as well as the blind, the conscious as well as the impulsive, moves through the lyrics with an almost noiseless tread. And the tragic course of human relations is traced through the song cycle, "The Hill Wife," with its conclusion:

> Sudden and swift and light as that
> The ties gave,
> And he learned of finalities
> Besides the grave.

Turning to the lyrics in "New Hampshire," subtitled "Grace Notes," we come to that clear etching, "Fire And Ice." Nine lines express the gamut of human relations. Nothing is left out, nothing can be added:

> Some say the world will end in fire,
> Some say in ice.
> From what I've tasted of desire
> I hold with those who favor fire.
> But if it had to perish twice,
> I think I know enough of hate
> To say that for destruction ice
> Is also great
> And would suffice.

This is a long step from the sentiment of Longfellow, the wise optimism of Emerson, the impassioned faith of Whitman. The poem is neither hopeful nor pessimistic; it faces facts and states them for what they are, in Frost's unique speech. If "the fact is the sweetest dream that labor knows," it is also the ideal of the poet. This is the high concern throughout his career. He is a critic of life per se, life apprehended by the sensibilities. Sensitive to every detail in Nature, details so clearly defined as to be almost the things themselves, he is equally aware of the most intimate lights and shades, the heart and head of humanity, the instincts of animals. There is not a more beautiful love poem in our speech than "Two Look At Two." But what mention is there of the actual emotion or its immortal word? Scarcely any.

Two lovers have wandered up a mountain side. They cannot go higher "with night so near." Of a sudden, they are confronted by a doe. "She saw them in their field, they her in hers." From her view, the lovers stand so still, they look "like some upended boulder split in two"—nothing to fear. Of a sudden, the buck appears. He too is puzzled by the motionless humans —seems to say, "I doubt if you're as living as you look." "Then he too passed unscared along the wall."

> Two had seen two, whichever side you spoke from.
> "This *must* be all." It was all. Still they stood,

A great wave from it going over them,
As if the earth in one unlooked-for favor
Had made them certain earth returned their love.

The poet has little use for illusions. He says to the builder, building his house—"Don't build me a chimney upon a shelf"—build it "clear from the ground." Otherwise reminders will come "of castles I used to build on air." Like the average Yankee of the best stock, Frost is so deeply "versed in country things," his experience is ripe and spacious. Thought has had time to ripen emotion. There is never any hurry here, as in the sophisticated town. Metropolitans flutter from adventure to adventure and sip the top off. The country fellow lives long enough with one thing to let that thing enter him fully. Naught is left out and, given the mellow awareness of Frost, naught is left out of the poetry. There are people who find him narrow, thin, incomplete. Unresponsive to his undertones and overtones, it is they who are incomplete.

The same human wizardry touches such lyrics as "The Aim Was Song," "Stopping By Woods On A Snowy Evening," "To Earthward," the portrait, "Not To Keep," and the Nature studies, "A Hillside Thaw," "A Brook In The City," "Good-Bye And Keep Cold." The magician never relies on legerdemain. The things and people he touches are real, and what he does to them equally so. One is rarely surprised by what he does; one is surprised, rather, by one's own failure to see these things before and to set them down just so. This is the most constant response to Frost's poetry. So too with the New Hampshire narratives: the title poem, a delightful mélange of philosophy and nonsense, "The Census-Taker," "The Star-Splitter," "Maple," "The Axe-Helve," "Two Witches" and "Paul's Wife," the best of the group.

If one confesses disappointment in Frost's recent "West-Running Brook," the feeling is due to the book's slender outlines. The author has made us wait nearly six years for this event, and the event brings about forty poems, many of which are mere fragments. Some of the poems are indexed with dates, referring to the time of the action or of the composition. In his

tenacious self-criticism and his refusal to rush into print, the poet has been known to hold back a poem for fifteen or twenty years. Casual though his style may seem and spontaneous the results, the final form is achieved only after repeated revisions. Nobody knows how many poems—narratives or even plays—Frost is hoarding for future publication. One cannot hurry this man any more than one can hurry the seasons. Public, publishers, critics, friends, family—no one but the man himself can lure the poet into print. His integrity with himself is absolute; he listens to no other voice. He has declared that "a complete poem is one where an emotion has found its thought and the thought has found the words." In the light of past definitions, with their vast rhetoric, this is an extraordinary definition. The process looks simple, and *is* simple. But simplicity is the most difficult of goals for an artist to master. In the recent book, we find continued hints of the further effort in Frost. In "Riders," we learn there are "ideas yet that we haven't tried," riders of the bareback earth that we are. In "The Armful," the poet, homeward bound with a load of bundles, finds some of them slipping and has to "sit down in the middle of them all . . . and try to stack them in a better load." And the independent spirit of Frost, the will to go one's own way, is expressed in "Sand Dunes." The polyphlœsbœan sea is not all-conquering:

> She may know cove and cape,
> But she does not know mankind
> If by any change of shape,
> She hopes to cut off mind.

Further philosophy is propounded in the five monosyllables: "Let what will be be." As to America, the quatrain, "Immigrants," tells the old tale and the new:

> No ship of all that under sail or steam
> Has gathered people to us more and more
> But Pilgrim-manned the Mayflower in a dream
> Has been their anxious convoy in to shore.

Compared to "North Of Boston," "Mountain Interval," "New Hampshire," this book is indeed fragmentary, but the fragments

contain a complete, practical view of life. There is no harder, saner, warmer, cooler philosophy than Frost's. Nor is it ever dryasdust—it sings. No man familiar with life is more dauntless in accepting life. Humanity is pinned down in "Fireflies In The Garden":

> Here come real stars to fill the upper skies,
> And here on earth come emulating flies,
> That though they never equal stars in size,
> (And they were never really stars at heart)
> Achieve at times a very star-like start.
> Only of course they can't sustain the part.

The game is open to anybody, whether he cares about it or not. Since he has to take part, no matter what his temper or environment, he had better sit down early and stick to the cards as long as there's breath in his body. If he can develop humor in the process, detachment toward his own agonies, a recognition of kinship with the other losers at the table, no one on earth but death can trump his best hand. And it may be death is the greatest loser of all.

XX

THE FREE VERSE REVOLT

How will this beauty, when I am far hence,
Sweep back upon me and engulf my mind!

Ezra Pound.

STRANGE are the feelings of one who goes prospecting over the immediate past, so fiery in its day, so quiet now. Stranger still the discovery that the esthetic war of fifteen years ago seems more remote than fifteen years ago, and still more remote than the World War. The terrible wounds of the universal strife have not yet healed; the scars of the esthetic war have long since disappeared—long since indeed, is the feeling. It is not that one has grown old or older; that is not the feeling; nor that one is afflicted with a nostalgia for "bygone days." No man with a heart in his body can spend much time looking back; it isn't in him to look back except in moments of perspective. But, during reflective moments, how curious is the position he finds himself in. The rebels of his day have been discarded by rebels around his knees. Around his knees, is the illusion, for these vivid youngsters were children fifteen years ago. If he isn't careful, memory will make him drowse, and some youth will yank his beard and crow, "Gaffer, tell us about the Imagists," much as one might ask a Civil War veteran about Gettysburg. I have been confronted with such a challenge—challenge is the word—for the tone was patronizing. And why shouldn't the young poet patronize the older? I don't believe I did it in my day, but one has to confess that the only poets who existed for me fifteen years ago were my contemporaries. People had written poetry before, but not such poetry as ours. Nor would people ever write such poetry again—such was the feeling then. And yet, people have written poetry since, poetry as good as ours, some of it possibly better. Not only this must

be confessed: it must be noted that people wrote poetry before us, much of it better than ours: more worthy of survival. This was a later feeling, bred in a survey of our poetry, back to its beginnings. Indeed, one found some of our dead more remote than poets who had died long before. We who remained to bury our dead, found spectres in the soil, marvelously close to our own lives: Poe, Emerson, Whitman, Dickinson. I am not approaching the immediate past with a funereal tread—that is not the feeling. Nor have I any obituaries in mind. One nears those days with security, knowing there are values to be extracted. They do not loom as large as they did—but loom they still do. It is not for me to say just how they compare with the ghostly quartet, or with poets of the present and future. I am still too young for such omniscience. One can only attempt the task—a difficult task for me—of going over the ground again, and trying to place it in our poetic history. I am not an historian by temperament; I much prefer to look ahead. . . .

All the data concerning the birth of Imagism are not yet available, and, until the last word has been spoken by Ezra Pound, some of the principal data will remain unknown or obscure. By tracing his early career, we find enough facts for an outline; but this career is partly shrouded in mystery. The extraordinary fellow was born in Idaho, studied at Hamilton College and the University of Pennsylvania and fled Philadelphia and the rest of our shores in 1908—at the age of twenty-three. His first book, "A Lume Spento," came out in Venice the same year. Pound then went to London. The following year, "Personæ" was brought out by Elkin Mathews, and pronounced by several English poets as a work of original excellence. It was followed by "Exultations," "Canzoni" and "Ripostes"—the last in 1912. Small-Maynard brought out a revised American edition of these volumes under the title, "Provença." In the early London days, Pound met a certain T. E. Hulme, whom he has praised at odd times, and whose half-dozen poems, written before he died in 1909, were the first Imagistic experiments. Imagism had reached London by way of Paris, Greece and the

Orient, and had reached Paris by way of the exotic American, Edgar Allan Poe. The student of the Symbolist movement in France need go no farther than the writings of Baudelaire and Mallarmé to learn what the Symbolists learned of Poe—particularly his criticism, his demand for pure estheticism, well-nigh divorced from life. And the absolute music of Poe's uncanny tales and disembodied poetry had a profound effect on the French masters, an indebtedness now shared by Paul Valéry. Pound's French connections, especially with Remy de Gourmont, the supreme critic of estheticism; his friendship with William Butler Yeats, another who drank at the moonlight springs of Symbolism; and his association in London with Ford Madox Hueffer, Richard Aldington and others, brought about a subtle interplay of forces which radically changed the course of American poetry. Furthermore, Pound's industry as a propagandist, his discovery and championing of unknown originals, his connection with such pioneer magazines as *The Egoist,* and *Poetry* and *The Little Review* (he was foreign editor of both), not to mention the help he extended to newer ventures which appealed to him—this enormous industry furthered the best interests of the craft. The sacrifices he made for his faith, the friendships he won and lost, the enmities he incurred, will some day contribute a fascinating chapter to American biography.

Though he is still concerned with new movements and fresh propaganda—vide *Blast,* his championing of Eliot and Joyce, and now his little magazine, *The Exile*—his later career is a matter of growing regret. The title of the latest venture is autobiographical. Pound left his barbarous shores twenty years ago. For him, his native land has advanced not one step beyond the wilderness. He has received repeated invitations to return, and would undoubtedly be greeted like a visiting potentate should he deign to accept one. It becomes apparent that he would hate nothing more on earth than to be disillusioned of his pet delusion. Pound resembles those Europeans who have never crossed the ocean and who sweep America aside with one contemptuous gesture. If Pound lost his gesture, he would have little left, for the anti-American pamphleteer has interred most of the poet.

This is a tragic pity, one of the keenest in our literary history, and one, somehow, which could only befall an American. Other Americans, who have raced abroad after culture, from Longfellow down to the latest, either returned to their shores or, like Henry James, were constantly haunted by them. At heart, Pound is even more native than the rest. He is certainly not English, Provençal, Italian, Spanish, Chinese—some of the cultures he has translated through himself. All this time, it would seem, he has tried to escape Ezra Pound—an unsuccessful move, happily for poetry. And none of the followers in his footsteps —from Eliot down to the latest revolté in the magazine, *transition*—have been able to escape themselves. What is there to escape, and why escape it? One is at a loss for all the facts and had better return to Imagism.

The first Imagistic poems appeared in *The Egoist, Poetry* and *The Poetry Journal,* and the first anthology, "Des Imagistes," edited by Pound, came out in *The Glebe* in February, 1914—a venture founded by the present writer. The issue had five American contributors: H. D., Skipwith Cannéll, Amy Lowell, William Carlos Williams and Pound; and five British: Aldington, Hueffer, F. S. Flint, James Joyce and Allen Upward. John Cournos, the Russo-American novelist, contributed an adaptation of K. Tetmaier. The most distinguished poems, the purely Imagistic, were those of H. D., Williams, Pound, Aldington and Flint. Pound was delightfully unsystematic. Whatever the vagaries and contradictions of the group he crowned with a French title (the group was, in fact, no group at all), Pound, in his Kensington Gardens, challenged the world of poetry a few months before Austria declared war on Serbia. The anthology was greeted with derision in high academic circles, and a battle of pens began between Americans abroad and Americans at home. The battle is still on, with, for the most part, a different and younger set of characters—still overshadowed by Pound, shifting his army base from London to Paris, Paris to Siena, Siena to Rapallo, and so on. Not long after "Des Imagistes" emerged, a quarrel of some sort broke out between Pound and Miss Lowell. The Brookline empress, as vigorous a person as

Pound, with a much more calculating genius, took over the reins of Imagism and supervised the publication of the next three anthologies. They came out in Boston in 1915, '16 and '17. An unsigned preface declared that "differences of taste and judgment . . . have arisen among the contributors to 'Des Imagistes'; growing tendencies are forcing them along different paths." A new title was decided on, "and we have been joined by two or three poets who did not contribute to the first volume, our wider scope making this possible." Aldington, H. D., Flint and Miss Lowell remained; John Gould Fletcher and D. H. Lawrence were added. No mention was made of Pound or the other absentees, or why they were absent. The energetic Ezra had already started another movement—with Wyndham Lewis and Gaudier-Brescka: Vorticism. The first issue of the monumental *Blast* appeared in 1914. Williams, never out of touch with Pound, joined still another group in the summer of 1915, a group which Ezra aided—a band of unknown men and women who contributed to a little venture of mine entitled *Others*. Most of the Imagists also appeared in that three-year venture, without subscribing to its still more "radical" tendencies.

In all these terse records, it is necessary to use the term, group, advisedly. The Imagists did not "represent an exclusive artistic sect; we publish our work together because of mutual artistic sympathy." They were "united by certain common principles, arrived at independently. These principles are not new; they have fallen into desuetude." With characteristic abandonment, the enemies of Imagism overlooked or ignored this salient sentence. They blindly attacked the movement in toto, without studying the relation of Imagism to the classics. The enemies displayed an appalling ignorance of the very classics they set up as a refutation of the young group. Free verse was by no means new. The angry academes could have found it in the Greeks, the Orientals, the Hebrews, Shakespeare, Milton, Arnold, Henley, etc. Not to mention Walt Whitman. And not to mention the French Symbolists. In their preface, the Imagists touched on the subject of free verse only to the extent of saying, "that we attach the term to all that increasing amount of writing

whose cadence is more marked, more definite, and closer knit than that of prose, but which is not so violently nor so obviously accented as the so-called 'regular verse.' We refer those interested in the question to the Greek Melic poets and to the many excellent French studies on the subject." Meanwhile, other men and women had arrived at free verse through still other channels. The movement was not confined to London, Paris, Boston or Grantwood, N. J. The rich Middle-Western movement, with its capital in Chicago, and its champion in Harriet Monroe, was ushered in by Carl Sandburg and Edgar Lee Masters. Both men owed a good deal to Imagism, and Sandburg to Whitman and Masters to the Greek Anthology; but both had original veins, as well. Further mention must be made of the host of minor singers who took to free verse overnight. Hundreds of people who had never written poetry, decided free verse must be easy, and committed one of the grandest conglomerate blunders in our literary annals. Before examining the free verse movement in detail, it remains to be said that every one concerned owed something direct or indirect to the self-appointed exile, Ezra Pound. He is one of the truest pioneers this country has ever known.

To begin with, free verse is by no means free. The term, borrowed from the French, is a contradiction or paradox. And any one analysis of free verse cannot reach a common denominator, embracing the work and theories of the various devotees. Each man had his own way of attempting free verse; individualism was at once its paramount virtue and vice. But no man of worth tried to do away with form; form was the very thing he sought, and sought, in many cases, to the exclusion of all else. The form was something which should give permanent shape to an intrinsic mood or experience. Since no two moods or actions were alike, no two forms could be identical. The error most of us made came out of the notion that no man could express his own self in traditional forms. It was a glorious error that led to some of the richest writings the country had ever known. Looking about them, the romantic radicals had nearly every reason for assuming that the old forms were outmoded and

useless. So far as they could tell in those dark lonely days, no one had the power to revive the old forms, give them an indigenous turn, stamp them with his own being, apart from all former beings. Democracy had begun to flatten all men alike; freedom and individualism were dead, historical words. Commercial magazines controlled the literary world, and their well-paid editors demanded a marketable sameness in the production of poetry. Even men who were handling old forms in their own way could not penetrate the standardized régime—witness Robert Frost. In the early years of the century, few readers took poetry seriously; it was relegated to low-down corners of periodicals and got to be known as "fillers." This contemptible condition drove Ezra Pound abroad, and drove the rest of us into isolated domiciles, where we worked with little or no knowledge of fellows in similar domiciles. The old forms we saw about us, handled in the most stilted style, were bloodless. They had nothing to do with our own lives, and evaded the racial call of Walt Whitman, the legendary hero of our youth.

The revolt against standardized America began with no one man. Years before we had news of the Imagists, some of us dreamed of a revolt, and sweated in silence over the first groping moods committed to paper. The first man to break the long silence and set us all dancing again was not Pound, or some voice from Paris or London, but a rhythmical, visionary Middle-Westerner: Vachel Lindsay. His "Rhymes To Be Traded For Bread" came out in 1912, supported and illustrated by his chanting vagabondage across the American map. But the lusty tramp, original though he was, still employed rhymes. The slow solitaries had decided to discard rhymes, along with conventional metres. The steps each man took for himself had no common basis; the tale of each separate advance is one each man must tell for himself. Outside of Pound and Amy Lowell, there were no propagandists among us, no controversialists, no dialectitians. It is therefore impossible to draw generalities about the rest. The movement which crystallized one and all, which brought about a recognition of quasi kinship, was Imagism. Imagism only gave us forms with which we were unfa-

miliar, stimulated us to try them. The individual response to our environment was still of necessity our own. Most of us welcomed Imagism enthusiastically, but were puzzled by its foreign airs and graces. It was not enough. It depended too much on books we didn't know and too little on the life we knew. We accepted the forms, but could not accept the whole spirit. What was all this about the Greeks, the Provençal, the Chinese? It was beautiful, alluring, intoxicating, but it did not stay with us. It was too remote from our lives among the lonely streets and byways of this mysterious land. The untutored among us, and most of us were untutored, felt as if we had neglected our education. Some of us could not afford education, not college education; others felt that college held the wrong education for them. We craved a more direct cultural expression, however crude, hard and blundering. Thus, the early free verse movement had two major tendencies: Americans abroad looked to literature for their models; those at home looked to life. The tendencies were not definitely demarcated; at times members of the camps changed sides. Clearly enough, all were concerned with new forms. At first, the reforms were fundamentally esthetic on both sides of the ocean. Later, those whose forms embraced more and more of life developed; those who did not were left behind. A conquest over form, old or new, is never enough. Neither is originality. Development can only ensue when the individual and his form assimilate each other, and do so with an ever-growing quality. Pound, Fletcher and Miss Lowell developed beyond Imagism. H. D. remains the one perfect Imagist, and the one who has grown inside the original restraints of the form. And her work, formerly dependent on the Greek, is now indubitably her own. It is our next task to go back to each leading American Imagist, with a view toward extracting independent values. The natural order seems to be: Pound, H. D., Amy Lowell, Fletcher. . . .

After "Ripostes," Ezra Pound issued several other volumes: "Lustra," "Cathay," "Poems From Blast," "Poems From Lustra" (1913). In the recent collection of his poetry, the last title

includes later groups: "Mœurs Contemporaines," "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley," "Homage To Sextus Propertius." The frequently heralded "Cantos," some of which have appeared separately, are still to be completed. Discussion of this ambitious project had better wait for the full returns. It seems to me that the productive years of Pound's poetic life range from 1908 to '17, and the comparatively unproductive to the time since intervening. The collected poems, like the earliest English edition, are called "Personæ." Opening the book again, we come upon a decided personality—many persons merged into one. The first number, "The Tree," a poem in perfect cadences, sings of "many a new thing understood that was rank folly to my head before." Folly is a pet epithet throughout Pound's career. This folly will save us from many a solemn poet before and after him. Pound not alone introduced fresh beauties into the language, but a bounding crew of risqué quips, nonsensicalities, buffooneries. The follies may prove his undoing ultimately, but their attack on the bourgeoisie was a tonic his countrymen needed. Only one quip is retained from the first three volumes: "Mr. Housman's Message," a satire on a dejected civilization. The first stanza gives the gist of the onslaught:

> O woe, woe,
> People are born and die,
> We also shall be dead pretty soon
> Therefore let us act as if we were
> dead already.

Otherwise, the early poems are earnest, exultant. So far there is no bitterness, but mainly a passionate devotion to strange old cultures, transmuted through the poet's personality. Most of all, we encounter the early troubadours: young Pound, tilting and chanting from land to land, is an American troubadour abroad. En Bertrans de Born and Arnaut Daniel are not the only heroes. Here are Cino, Villon, Browning, Cavalcanti, Propertius, Apuleius, du Bellay, Leopardi, Heine and other scamps and tragi-comedians. Here also are such poems as "La Fraisne," "Praise Of Ysolt," the pre-Raphaelitic; and the power-

ful tour de force, "Ballad Of The Goodly Fere," in which Christ is a masculine being, and not the effeminized dreamer most poets try to accustom us to. Does it matter which of these poems are translations, which adaptations, and which originals? A forthright gusto springs from them all, an irresistible array of images, a swinging orotundity. Pedants have picked holes in Pound's scholarship. If what they say is true, so much the better for poetry. Among our poets, there are sounder, broader scholars, but few have written poetry equal to Pound's best work. He has courted men like himself in the past, and in bringing them up to date, a new ego has been coined. Every other page has something to say about songs, singing and beauty. Most of it is vigorous, little of it scholastic. And how skillful the handling of the varied and difficult verse forms. Here indeed is a modern lutanist, a spontaneous romancer in a flat, gray world.

The best of Pound comes out of the next three books: "Ripostes" (dedicated to Williams), "Lustra" and "Cathay." The poet sings more directly out of himself. And here one detects his influence over other poets. At the very outset, "Portrait D'Une Femme" is a forerunner of T. S. Eliot's more famous "Portrait Of A Lady." Eliot's indebtedness to Pound has never been properly appreciated by anyone outside of Eliot. The present younger generation has fixed upon him as its guide and discarded Pound almost entirely. On the one hand, compared to Eliot's precise scholarship, Pound's is impulsive and slipshod; on the other, Eliot writes in the dark, Pound in the open. Eliot moves along in a mysterious halo to which his critical endowment adds an excathedraic tone. After the romantic outburst of the free verse movement, poetry needed a severe, synthetic critic. Next to Eliot's classical prose, Pound's reads like jargon. Furthermore, Eliot, equally versed in French Symbolism, and directly indebted to the sophisticated disillusionist, Jules Laforgue, arose at a time when post-war despair smote the younger generation with futilitarianism. It has not yet recovered from this hopeless mood, and Eliot, more than any other poet, has invested the mood with profound magic and beauty. And the

air of mysticism surrounding his poetry, a revival of English metaphysical poets, added still another alluring tone. Further domination comes out of Eliot's triumph in the London from which Pound had to flee. The St. Louis poet is the high priest of letters over there. Finally, his antipathy to things American is expressed in cool, contemptuous irony; Pound's was much too hot-headed. Eliot won the younger generation without waging war on his old comrade. He was probably unconscious of any battle—even indifferent to it. From this it may appear that Eliot has all the perfections, Pound all the imperfections—an erroneous deduction. Pound's vices and faults need not be condemned or condoned. They rise from a generous nature without whose bold blunders American poetry could not have taken its recent step ahead. If I put my reliance on blunderers, it is because I cannot forget our other blunderers: Emerson, Whitman, Melville. Pound is not of their stature, but he belongs to their independent line.

"Ripostes," issued when Pound was twenty-seven, contains the purely Imagistic poems, "N.Y.," "Δώρια," "Sub Mare" and "The Return." Here is that passion for the exact word, *le mot juste,* which distinguishes the Symbolists and Imagists. The method is metaphysical, precise, melodious—a kind of absolute music in petto. H. D. surpassed Pound in these delicate forms, but she has never surpassed—

> Be in me as the eternal moods
> of the bleak wind, and not
> As transient things are—
> gaiety of flowers.

The volume also contains "The Seafarer," from the Anglo-Saxon, and the exquisite "A Virginal." In "Lustra," "an offering for the sins of the whole people," Pound emerges still further. It is probably the best of his books, and sets forth his protean character as Imagist, satirist, portraitist, musician, lover, friend, enemy, pornographer, scholar. Here are those saucy colloquies with his songs: "The Condolence," "Salutation The Second"—

> Go, little naked and impudent songs,
> Go with a light foot—

"Further Instructions," "Commission," "Ité," "Epilogue," "Salvationists"—

> Come, my songs, let us speak of perfection—
> We shall get ourselves rather disliked.

They are an attack on the smug, the successful, the Puritanical. The adoration of the nude stems from Whitman, but the derision of the middle class is Pound's. The derision is developed in "The Garret"—"Come, let us pity those who are better off than we are"—in "Salutation"—"And the fish swim in the lake and do not even own clothing"—and among the risqué audacities: "The Bellaires," "Arides," "The Temperaments," "Amities," "Meditation," "Ladies," "Phyllidula," etc. Those poems came to Pound via the Greek and Latin decadents, and are refreshing so long as they are not overdone. When they are good they are very good, but when they are bad they read like the naughty words boys scrawl on city fences. They may shock the bourgeoisie the right way, but they shock the artist the wrong way. It is out of this side of Pound that Williams was born.

Of the poems of sheer beauty, we have "Ortus," "Albatre," "Dance Figure," "A Study In Æsthetics" and "Provincia Deserta," with its Provençal air. There are likewise the exquisite Chinese fragments such as "Fan-Piece, For Her Imperial Lord":

> O fan of white silk,
> clear as frost on the grass-blade,
> You also are laid aside.

These are preliminary to the superb poems of Cathay, "for the most part from the Chinese of Rihaku, from the notes of the late Ernest Fenollosa." Here is something infinitely finer than a scholar grubbing among languages, something beyond translation or transliteration. "Song Of The Bowmen Of Bu" is after Bunno, about 1100 B.C., and unfolds that concrete directness, devoid of extraneous abstractions, for which the Chinese genius is noted throughout the ages. Of the Rihaku poems, eighth

century A.D., the richest are "The River Song," "The River-Merchant's Wife," "Poem By The Bridge At Ten-Shin," "Lament Of The Frontier Guard," "Exile's Letter." One can find a kinship between these poems and Imagistic ideals. Though the language is direct and clear, it involves symbolical overtones. When the river-merchant's young wife writes to her absent "My Lord you," she touches her loneliness indirectly: "The monkeys make sorrowful noise overhead." "By the gate now, the moss is grown." "The paired butterflies are already yellow with August." The Imagists learned as much from the Chinese as they did from the Greeks or the Symbolists.

"Poems From Lustra," 1915, is an extension of the earlier Lustra, and opens with the finest of Pound's long poems: "Near Perigord." This is literally drenched with the atmosphere of the Middle Ages, with the vigorous spirit of En Bertrans and the jongleur's courtship of Maent. Further cultures and poets are sounded; the book begins to grow repetitious. Some poems from the Langue d'Oc are followed by the Mœurs Contemporaines, wherein Eliot owes still more to Pound, or, by this time, Pound owes something to Eliot. In either case, Ezra is much more savage than his whilom comrade:

> Upon learning that the mother wrote verses,
> And that the father wrote verses,
> And that the youngest son was in a publisher's office,
> And that the friend of the second daughter was
> undergoing a novel,
> The young American pilgrim
> Exclaimed:
> "This is a darn'd clever bunch!"

Such things are delightful. The trouble is that their author, henceforth, is more and more consumed with them, less and less with the idols of his youth. A note to Hugh Selwyn Mauberley describes that sequence as "a farewell to London." Britain, ere now, had been added to his contempt for America. The group is likewise notable for its employment of vengeful themes set to stinging rhymes—a resemblance to Eliot's gallery of intellectual portraits polysyllabically rhymed, a field in which Eliot

is superior. The old Pound rises for a moment in "Envoi" (1919), with its address to his "dumb-born book." It concludes:

> Tell her that goes
> With song upon her lips
> But sings not out the song, nor knows
> The maker of it, some other mouth,
> May be fair as hers,
> Might, in new ages, gain her worshippers,
> When our two dusts with Waller's shall be laid,
> Siftings on siftings in oblivion,
> Till change hath broken down
> All things save Beauty alone.

A little later, we find the quoted speech:

> "I was
> And I no more exist;
> Here drifted
> An hedonist."

These lines have the tone of obituaries, but at least they were written by Pound. If he has not sung out the song, he may still do so; and if he does not, the unfinished song is more moving than bundles of perfect little lyrics by perfect little people. The trouble seems to be that Pound gave too much attention to fame from the outset. He has won enough to satisfy any mortal craving. Craving still more, he has descended to the crowd he despises and fought in the market-place. Fame is a pretty tawdry business, not the prime concern of a passionate artist. Pound has been attacked by his native land, never by his fellows in that land. He has earned their affection and an enviable place in their esteem. This should suffice any man for one lifetime. His peevish impatience with America is justified to a certain degree. But it should not have grown to proportions overshadowing more potent concerns. At best, there is no finer poet, no finer fellow and friend than Pound. It happens that I owe much to him and he owes nothing to me. I am therefore no creditor; and when I say he is wasting precious energies on nebulæ by perpetually hammering a land of twenty years ago,

I say a thing which is absolutely true. Our land undoubtedly needs more education—the string he is always harping on. What he has in mind is the job of pedants, and we have plenty of pedants for the job. There is one activity no country can ever get enough of: poetry. And I think I am justified in adding that this country can never get enough of the poems of Ezra Pound. . . .

Hilda Doolittle, born the year after Pound, in Bethlehem, Pa., is a graduate of Bryn Mawr. She went abroad in 1911, and except for one visit to America, has never returned. Her body may have come out of Pennsylvanian soil, but her spirit came out of Greece. H. D. is not an anachronism, but a living woman and lyrist of a high order. Her books tell all we need to know of her life and art. In this she resembles Emily Dickinson. H. D.'s first volume, "Sea Garden," appeared in 1916. "Hymen" followed in '21, "Heliodora" in '24, and her collected poems a year later. More recently, she has been composing Imagistic novels and novelettes, fully as distinguished as her poetry. The stories are written, not in prose, but in prose poetry, in a style clearly her own. H. D. has carried Imagism farther than any member of the now disbanded group. Where others have dropped away from the ideals set down in the manifesto of 1915, and where still others, Pound, Amy Lowell and Fletcher, have pursued different paths, H. D. has remained true to the original tenets and developed them for herself. She is indeed the perfect Imagist; and one is tempted to call her the most perfect or nearly perfect of all American poets. Not alone has she mastered the single string she plays so poignantly and hauntingly, but with each performance, the vibrations grow richer, more moving. In her steady development, she still adheres to "the exact word," to poetry "that is hard and clear, never blurred nor indefinite." Hard and clear though her poems are, they are also profoundly musical. Cadences echo the meaning as faithfully as in the fragmentary relics of her great idol, Sappho. More than any other descendant of the immortal Lesbian, this American deserves the proverbial laurel.

But Hilda Doolittle is no mere follower or imitator. The life and music of her poems are inevitably her own.

The second section of the poem, "Sea Gods," shows her mastery over the color and movement of myriad violets. Nuances in emotion, tint and tone are wrought through the simplest, subtlest uses of repetition. Here one finds the poetic prototype of the musician's theme with variations, each variation enriching the original theme. The very word, violet, moves back and forth across the page as surely as the flower moves across the woods, marshes and rocks of the earth itself:

> But we bring violets,
> great masses—single, sweet,
> wood-violets, stream-violets,
> violets from a wet marsh.
>
> Violets in clumps from hills,
> tufts with earth at the roots,
> violets tugged from the rocks,
> blue violets, moss, cliff, river-violets.
>
> Yellow violets' gold,
> burnt with a rare tint—
> violets like red ash
> among tufts of grass.
>
> We bring deep-purple
> bird-foot violets.
>
> We bring the hyacinth-violet,
> sweet, bare, chill to the touch—
> and violets whiter than the inrush
> of your own white surf.

Intensity breathes at the core of this poem. Like Emily Dickinson, H. D. is in love with gardens, but her gardens are gardens of the sea, Emily's of the hillside. Though H. D.'s language is more restrained on the surface, it is fully as impassioned as Emily's, and the core closer to the body and nudity. It will usually take many readings to unearth the meaning of H. D.'s poetry. It is better to let the poetry seize oneself; one cannot go after it. One must sit removed from all worldly consideration, from everything but the lines themselves. One must let

them induce a trance and swiftly people the trance with their own images and meanings. Behind their Greek symbolism, the perpetual references to Greek gods, men and women, fables and legends, a wonderful heart beats away, an independent spirit, a lover, a woman. Inside the cold, hard forms, the song is extraordinary, fiery, tempestuous, proud, overwhelming. Patrician pride must have given final shape to the emotions. These poems were set down for one or two eyes and ears remote from all else: from time and space, and especially from the vulgar. The songs are unpopular and can never be popular. How many people can give themselves completely to what they read? Very few. And the few who can give themselves to this poetry must be puzzled by some of it. Those among the puzzled who hold privacy inviolate, their own as well as this woman's, will not attempt to unravel the mystery. They need but search their own lives, male or female, for the related autobiography, and follow the mystery thither. H. D.'s poems are intensely personal and the form completely impersonal. The varied forms are so finished, so statuesque, as to give the appearance of perfect figurines, cold to the touch—till one touches them. Then one is slowly heated and thrilled; one's veins and arteries beat higher and higher; one is flooded with love and runs mad with it, as this woman runs mad with it.

The poems of "Sea Garden" may roam ancient Greece for their images, but the implications are vivid, blood-red and modern. "The Helmsman" addressed is no ordinary helmsman, nor is the boat he is asked to guide a mere boat—

> But now, our boat climbs—hesitates—
> drops—
> climbs—hesitates—crawls back—
> climbs—hesitates—
> O be swift—
> we have always known you wanted us.

The poem, "Pursuit," holds the essence of ecstasy and tragedy. A woman is searching a stream-bank for traces of her departed lover—though such a word is never employed—nor so obvious an interpretation. Indeed, any interpretation is the conscious

act of the reader, and has to be. In "The Contest," there is a clean-cut portrait of the male. The figure has the grace and strength of the Greeks. In "Sheltered Garden," the woman is weary of "beauty without strength," and yearns for "a new beauty in some terrible wind-tortured place." In "Orchard," one of the early poems, the cry is "Spare us from loveliness." The reason for this tragic call comes out of Night—

> O night,
> you take the petals
> of the roses in your hand,
> but leave the stark core
> of the rose
> to perish on the branch.

The absent one is again invoked in "Prisoners"—the man and woman in separate cells. Always the tone is austere, proud, more than human, and its background the sea, cliffs, winds, heat and light. "The Shrine" is an impassioned sea poem:

> Nay, you are great, fierce, evil—
> you are the land-blight—
> you have tempted men
> but they perished on your cliffs.

Never the soft, the effeminate, is allowed to intrude, not even among flowers. The grasp of a violet may be frail, but it catches the light—"frost, a star edges with its fire." In a group headed by "The God," the artist at work is revealed in "Pygmalion" . . .

> have I made this fire from myself?
> or is this arrogance?
> is this fire a god
> that seeks me in the dark?

In the legend of Eurydice, the woman rebuffs the renewed suit of Orpheus:

> if you had let me wait
> I had grown from listlessness
> into peace,
> if you had let me rest with the dead,
> I had forgot you
> and the past.

The hell in which she lives is no worse than his "earth above the earth"—"at least I have the flowers of myself . . ."

> and my spirit with its loss
> knows this;
> though small against the black,
> small against the formless rocks,
> hell must break before I am lost;
> before I am lost,
> hell must open like a red rose
> for the dead to pass.

"Hymen" is notable, first of all, for the introduction of an occasional appropriate rhyme, always delicately handled. The prefatory stanza renders the new mood as well as the new form. Though "she is high and far and blind in her high pride," the head bowed in sorrow finds her "most kind." The title poem is a quiet, Grecian rendering of the marriage ceremony. Various metres, strophes and antistrophes, carry the movement with classic precision. There are poems to Demeter, Circe, Leda, Phædra, Hippolyta. But none are more moving than an English Cuckoo Song, "with its simple top-note and soft fall." Here is no desire for the nightingale, "with her wail," nor the swallow, the oriole. No longer the desire to be "numb with ecstasy," or to "drown with death":

> only you sooth, make still
> the throbbing of our brain:
> so through her forest trees,
> when all her hope was gone
> and all her pain,
> Calypso heard you call—
> across the gathering drift
> of burning cedar-wood,
> across the low-set bed
> of wandering parsley and violet,
> when all her hope was dead.

"The Islands" is a fascinating poem, with its alluring array of names—but "what are the islands to me, what is Greece?" "What has love of land given to you that I have not?" "What

are the islands to me if you are lost?" Phædra confesses that "the poppy that my heart was, formed to bind all mortals,"

> fades and shrinks, a dead leaf
> drenched and torn in the cold rain.

In one poem, she contrasts herself with Hippolyta, "who relented not, returned and sought no kiss," and in the next, rebukes Hippolyta for her chastity.

In "Heliodora," the tone of resignation is driven before new heat, new passion. Italicized versions of Plato, Meleager, Nossis and Sappho are harmoniously woven into the body of poems. There is a magic lyric on Helen, whom "all Greece hates," whom Greece could love if she were dead. In "At Ithaca," a wife is reduced to tragic monotony—

> I wish some fiery friend
> would sweep impetuously
> these fingers from the loom.

But of what avail would the rivals be—

> I see my lord who moves
> like Hector, lord of love,
> I see him matched with fair
> bright rivals and I see
> those lesser rivals flee.

Various Sapphic fragments are extended by the author. Song is a lovelier gift than love:

> Shall I turn and take
> comfortless snow within my arms?
> press lips to lips
> that answer not,
> press lips to flesh
> that shudders not nor breaks?

In another fragment, she says, "Yet to sing love, love must first shatter us." The greatest intensity pulses through Fragment Sixty-Eight:

> Though he pierce me—imperious—
> iron—fever—dust—
> though beauty is slain

when I perish,
I envy you death.

Another tremendous little poem is "Cassandra":

Is there none left
can equal me
in ecstasy, desire?
is there none left
can bear with me
the kiss of your white fire?

Hilda Doolittle is a great lyric poet in her own field. Other poets will doubtless always enjoy more popularity. Her work is far beyond the hands of the mob. Though the prevailing key of her song is tragic, the tragedy is full-blown, austere, untinged with self-pity. Whatever one reads into her work—and error is easy in this connection—one is strengthened by these fearless lines. Life, love and death take on an heroic significance. And so does art, for this woman is a perfect artist. . . .

One evening in May, 1925—it doesn't seem so long ago—a paralytic stroke defeated the most dynamic personality in modern American poetry: Amy Lowell. Somehow, something more than her own warfare came to an end. I felt at the time that the whole spirit of controversy had closed. The battles she fought with others, the battles we were led into against our own will, were over. Those of us who had never missed her before missed her for the first time. Those for whom she fought their own battles missed her most; they were her intimates in life and poetry. Though I knew Miss Lowell over a period of about ten years, saw and corresponded with her sporadically, I did not learn to know her at all well until the final year. I begin with this personal note because it colors my present perspective. I was never a deep admirer of her work until her latest poems appeared. Before that time, I felt that she echoed, in her abundant versatility, every other poet but herself. She was a brilliant mocking bird of other styles. There was no mood, no character, no form she could not achieve on the surface; in her

amazing vitality, she played every conceivable rôle. Her own rôle was not the rôle of an artist, so much as a mummer's—an actress in male attire. One thought of her as a buccaneer scuttling the craft of conservatives and even going so far as to strip radical vessels of their best prizes. But the masculine Miss Lowell was more than a pirate. The one time I dined at the Brookline estate, I felt as if I were in audience with a late Roman emperor—possibly Nero fiddling among the flames. And yet, I learned to know her a little more closely, perhaps more accurately. In unguarded moments, she seemed an intensely feminine person, not without innocence and wistfulness, and I decided—if one can ever decide anything—that her abnormal ambition and industry had obscured her true character. The rôle she played for the world was masculine, valiant, combative—and the inner being, private, lonely, susceptible to human fragility.

Amy Lowell was a descendant of an aristocrat line, stemming back to the first Colonists. One of her grandfathers was a cousin of James Russell Lowell; the other was minister to England. Her brother, Percival Lowell, was a noted astronomer; her brother, Abbott Lawrence Lowell, is President of Harvard. Miss Lowell, though by no means a radical, has justly been termed the black sheep of the family. Other aristocrats have taken to poetry in the past—but not as a profession. She served a long apprenticeship—especially to versification—and it was not until 1910 that her first verse appeared: in *The Atlantic Monthly*. It was followed two years later by her first book, "A Dome Of Many-Colored Glass": conventional poems on conventional themes. Of her extensive travels, none were as important as the trip to London which brought her in touch with Pound and the Imagists. Here she studied poetry through contact with living artists. Ten years older than any member of the group, Miss Lowell had ten times their practical energy. After the differences with Pound—an event to which she dedicated a trivial poem—Miss Lowell took the affairs of Imagism in hand. She was master and mistress of every known method of advertising, propaganda, controversy and public speaking,

and her brilliant wit cracked many a hostile skull. She intimidated virtually every one who approached the throne she sat on —no matter what or where the occasion. The tales about such encounters are legion. This is the Amy Lowell the earth cannot replace.

"Sword Blades And Poppy Seed," 1914, was the first of her books flavored with Imagism. One cannot compare this work with the early work of Pound, H. D., Aldington and Flint. It is an echo of theirs, and the rest of the book an echo of the French Parnassians to whom her preface pays tribute. She declares her "immense debt" on "the purely technical side" to the French, and above all, the Parnassians, from Le Conte de Lisle and José-Maria de Hérédia down to Paul Fort—from whom she borrowed the methods of polyphonic prose. Pound is addressed in a poem called "Astigmatism." Any one immune to astigmatism can see that Miss Lowell owed her emergence as a poet to nobody else but Ezra. Even the red-blood ballad, "After Hearing A Waltz By Bartok," is superficial muscularity. One is only moved by its pseudo masculinity. The polyphonic prose piece, "The Forsaken," in which a girl, heavy with an illegitimate child, prays to the Mary Mother, is likewise vicarious. The passion is superimposed by a person consciously witnessing the throes of the girl without penetrating their poignancy. Miss Lowell has written a host of ballads on a host of themes, but the ballads came out of her reading, rarely out of life. The portrait, "A Lady," is the most effective number in the book. Miss Lowell was most at home with ladies she addressed, for the sake of verisimilitude, from a masculine view. Whether this method hides an inverted narcissism is a problem for the psychologist.

It is strange that her venture into polyphonic prose—an adventure joined by Fletcher—has had little effect on our subsequent poetry. Theoretically, it is a remarkably plastic form. It employs, as Miss Lowell has said, "metre, vers libre, assonance, alliteration, rhyme and return," and is written as prose. Possibly Louis Untermeyer has struck at the prime fault of her polyphonic prose, or of most of her verse: "Motion frequently

takes the place of emotion." Examining the later volumes, "Men, Women And Ghosts," "Can Grande's Castle," "Pictures Of The Floating World," "Legends," "What's O'Clock," "East Wind," "Ballads For Sale" (the last three issued posthumously), one is dazzled with the enormous output, the incredible variety of themes, the technical facility. But after reading hundreds of pages, one is forced to concede that Untermeyer was right. Beginning as her principal antagonist, this poet-critic became her principal champion—a curious development. One does not question the sincerity of his later view. Miss Lowell had developed, but developed how far? How many poems stir the heart beyond the moment of reading? On the whole, very few. A lover of color and sound responds to the countless images and rhythms. But they are mostly patterns, undulating lines tastefully arranged, perfect surfaces and movements. No painter can draw better, no musician beat time more accurately; no man is more conscious of his effects. But what do these poems contain beyond consciousness and effectiveness? I am sure the poet wished to smite the reader with emotion; drive him mad, break him in two. There is no instrument Miss Lowell does not employ. She knows all about the old symphonies, all about Stravinsky. But whether she turns to the classical orchestra of Haydn and Mozart, or to the daring combinations of the latest modern, something is always missing. One is inclined to call this by an old-fashioned phrase: the human heart. Miss Lowell must have had such an organ; one begins to feel it in some of the latest poems. Formerly, she guarded it like an aristocrat, gave it to no one in her poetry, shared it with none outside her library and the famous garden of her walks. That garden is constantly referred to, referred to as often as Emily sang about hers, H. D. about hers. Songs in the Brookline enclosure came from overhead or out of the bushes and flowers. The poet made note of the spontaneous birds without joining them. Her poems do not sing; they lack passion and ecstasy. The real tragedy is, they are devoid of tragedy. They have everything but this quintessential quality. Lacking in love, they lack life, and

lacking life, only a few can survive. Amy Lowell had many talents, but no genius. Genius gives itself recklessly and continuously, without demanding a return. Genius and giving are synonymous in their functions.

None the less, Miss Lowell has a creditable list of poems to her name. Making a random list, one is aware that it might be lengthened, revised, improved. I am not an incomparable critic—no critic at all, in fact. If I were an anthologist, with a limited choice at my disposal, I should choose: "Music," "A Lady," "Madonna Of The Evening Flowers," "A Decade," "Meeting-House Hill," "Patterns," "Venus Transiens," "Chinoiseries," "Solitaire," "A Gift," "Mackerel Sky," "Purple Grackles," "The Sisters," "Nuit Blanche," "Attitude Under An Elm Tree," "Night Clouds" and "Lilacs," especially "Lilacs." The last eight are fairly recent poems, and therefore among the best. In almost all, the poet masquerades in one of her Browningesque disguises. In "A Decade," she plays the part of a caustic wife or husband:

> When you came, you were like red wine and honey,
> And the taste of you burnt my mouth with its sweetness.
> Now you are like morning bread,
> Smooth and pleasant.
> I hardly taste you at all, for I know your savour;
> But I am completely nourished.

"Meeting-House Hill" has a nostalgic yearning for China. "Patterns," her most popular poem, describes a lady in her garden paths: patterns in which she is a pattern herself. Inside "the stiff brocade," a "passion wars." She has hidden away a letter informing her that "Lord Hartwell died in action Thursday se'n-night." She was betrothed to his lordship,

> Fighting with the Duke in Flanders,
> In a pattern called a war.
> Christ! What are patterns for?

"Venus Transiens" praises another lady, comparable with Botticelli's vision. "Chinoiseries" reflect the poet's indebtedness to

the poems and tapestries of old China. "Solitaire" does the same. The conclusion is unique if one knows that Miss Lowell did most of her writing at night and sleeping by day:

> How light and laughing my mind is,
> When all the good folk have put out their bed-room candles,
> And the city is still!

"A Gift" describes the "words" a lover gives his beloved:

> When I shall have given you the last one
> You will have the whole of me,
> But I shall be dead.

One would feel this more poignantly had the lover given more than words. "Mackerel Sky," another love poem, closes on the significant line: "I am gayer in my colours than in my heart." "The Sisters" has an autobiographical interest. The heroines of this poem happen to be Sappho, Mrs. Browning, Emily Dickinson—and Amy Lowell. "Night Clouds" is one of the many grotesques Miss Lowell was fond of; but they are based on fancy, not on the imagination. "Attitude Under An Elm Tree" has an inverted fascination. A woman passes her life in an upper chamber "playing upon the virginals," the while her serenader roams the hills on a red charger. This is doubtless another of the many poems on dual personality.

We now come to the purely Yankee poems: "Purple Grackles" and "Lilacs." In her constant roaming of the high seas of fact and fancy, Miss Lowell had never forsaken New England. She returned to it often in writing, and in "East Wind," devoted a whole volume to stories in the Yankee vernacular, stories decidly inferior to Robert Frost's. In "Purple Grackles" and "Lilacs," she faced her own life to the exclusion of all other rôles. Grackles have returned to her garden, and these "nonchalant highwaymen, pickpockets, second-story burglars" steal her "little hope of Summer." "It seems they delight in unmasking my poor pretence." Written in the vein of high, speedy comedy, the poem reveals that the poet is of no consequence to the birds. Suddenly, the Equinox rises: she is in dread of the grackles' departure: "I grant their coming, but I would not have them go."

The grackles have gone,
And I watch an Autumn storm
Stripping the garden,
Shouting black rain challenges
To an old, limp Summer
Laid down to die in the flower-beds.

"Lilacs" is fully as poignant a poem. Behind "the heart-shaped leaves," one can hear the beat of a heart-shaped woman. The tribute to the "great puffs of flowers" all over New England in Spring depends upon a beautifully handled array of the places where lilacs abound: in dooryards, around a deserted house, above a cellar, along the road, near pasture-bars where—

You persuaded the housewife that her dishpan was of silver
And her husband an image of pure gold.

The color symphony—not unrelated to Fletcher's symphonies on flowers—charges "the noses of quill-driving clerks." The "paradoxical" Yankees turn to writing poetry behind their ledgers. Lilacs belong to dead people, to pale ghosts, to the green sea and stone hills. "You are of great parks where everyone walks and nobody is at home." And now the flowers are challenged:

You have forgotten your Eastern origin,
The veiled women with eyes like panthers,
The swollen, aggressive turbans of jewelled Pashas.
Now you are a very decent flower,
A reticent flower,
A curiously clear-cut, candid flower . . .

Then follows a roll-call of the Puritan states where the flower is now at home:

May is a full light wind of lilacs
From Canada to Narragansett Bay.

The poem closes on the most personal note the poet ever revealed:

Heart-leaves of lilac all over New England,
Roots of lilac under all the soil of New England,
Lilac in me because I am New England,
Because my roots are in it,
Because my leaves are of it,

Because my flowers are for it,
Because it is my country
And I speak to it of itself
And sing of it with my own voice
Since certainly it is mine.

No one can tell—no one has told so far—what tumults played behind "the stiff brocade" of Amy Lowell, longing for China, playing a thousand and one jaunty rôles, many of them masculine, pacing her sumptuous garden, and writing poetry by moonlight. Such an inquiry is best answered by the poet herself in a poem "TO A GENTLEMAN WHO WANTED TO SEE THE FIRST DRAFTS OF MY POEMS IN THE INTERESTS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL RESEARCH INTO THE WORKINGS OF THE CREATIVE MIND." One cannot resist the pun: this is capital punishment, a sardonic attack on prying psychologists:

Though I shudder thinking of you wandering through my beds
of bloom,
You may come with spade and shovel when I'm safely in the tomb.

This is an invitation that I, for one, heartily avoid. I had enough trouble with Amy Lowell while she was alive. And I have an uncomfortable feeling, not unmixed with happiness, that she's still about somewhere, and may hand me another black cigar to induce another smoky duel. I'm afraid I have to close as I began, on a personal note: Miss Lowell, the duelist, meant more to me than Miss Lowell, the artist. Back in 1922, now so very long ago, the poetic world was treated to that brilliant anonymous hoax, "A Critical Fable," which nearly everybody attributed to everybody but the doughty descendant of James Russell Lowell and his "Fable For Critics." Among the "quips and digressions on the poets of the day," there was a witty sketch of a poet who must perforce remain incognito: one who assured me at the time that the author of the hoax was none other than Amy Lowell. We argued the matter over many a crusty pipe. The fellow having convinced me of his amazing insight, I mailed our congratulations to Brookline. I got a hot, short letter in response, the hottest and shortest I have ever received this side of heaven or hell. . . .

Idaho, Bethlehem, Brookline, sent three Imagists to London; a Southern city, Little Rock, sent the fourth: John Gould Fletcher. The queerest and least understood of the four, Fletcher descended on the British capital by bringing out five different books with four different publishers, 1913. Every few years, he wanders back to America only to wander back to London. His restless nature is rarely at home anywhere, and his gorgeous imagination, a lonely spirit afire with mystic yearning, now roves among insoluble vistas and horizons. He marches toward the unattainable with singular courage and reduces his discoveries to what Conrad Aiken once termed, absolute poetry. This term has a kinship with absolute music, as opposed to program music. "It is," wrote his fellow Southerner, "a beautiful flowering of language alone, a parthenogenesis, as if language were fertilized by itself rather than by thought or feeling. . . . But the magic of phrase and sound is powerful, and takes one into a fantastic world where one is etherealized, where one has deep emotions indeed, but emotions star-powdered, and blown to flame by speed and intensity rather than by thought or human warmth." This analysis refers to Fletcher the Imagist, author of "Irradiations" and "Goblins And Pagodas," reissued later under the musical title, "Preludes And Symphonies." Aiken's conclusions are often cramped by his devotion to fascinating theses, logically carried through. The early Fletcher poems have Southern soil as their source. His rich embroidery of images is to be found throughout Southern poetry, from Poe to Lanier, from Aiken to John Crowe Ransom. All Southerners, whether they write poetry or prose or take to religion or oratory, have a love of rhetoric, a love which qualified Fletcher for Symbolism and Imagism. But he did not completely divorce himself from life, nor from sex either—as parthenogenesis implies. His later books show a closer communion with life; they are more realistic and concern themselves with things definitely American, as well as superterrestrial. Aiken's approach to Fletcher was correct, but his deductions were too restricted, a little ungenerous.

Fletcher may have been the least popular of the Imagists—

an unpopularity which pursues him even now, in the course of a broader development. But the fault is due, not to the poet, but to his readers. Fletcher has faults—more than many lesser poets. He is another of the reckless blunderers whose progress with the public is slow. A hermit by disposition, an impassioned monk, he has the virtues and vices of any egocentric artist. But he has a great deal to give, despite his failure to communicate himself fully and clearly. His symphonic instrument is erratic. At times he writes like an inspired god in chaos, and then falls away and fumbles about like a tyro. A tremendously prolific person, he lacks the power of self-criticism essential to major artistry. He has major intentions without the minor talents for revising his tumultuous output. If Fletcher had Amy Lowell's talent, or Miss Lowell had had his genius, a first-rate lyric poet would have emerged. They were great friends: "Preludes And Symphonies" was dedicated to her. For sheer lyric artistry—passion welded to cold hard form —both poets were surpassed by H. D. But H. D. perfected a single string: a simpler task than Fletcher's endeavor to master all instruments, natural and supernatural. His quest of the divine is another reason for his unpopularity. The public has never followed—certainly not of late years—the visions of mystics. People prefer something closer at hand, something more comfortable, something to read in rocking chairs.

The gorgeous "Irradiations" are not alone Imagistic: many of the rhetoric figures depend upon languorous Southern landscapes. The opening poem, with its swift movement, may have been written abroad, but the mood and language are native.

> . . . the passing of the wind
> Upon the pale lower terraces of my dream
> Is like the crinkling of the wet grey robes
> Of the hours that come to turn over the urn
> Of the day and spill its rainy dream.

Sails and rivers abound in other Irradiations. Though exotic images, many of them Oriental, color the lines, one can feel the Mississippi flow through them. Always the phrases are gorgeous, their progressions harmonious. Umbrellas are

"recurved blossoms of the storm." Here is a love motif in two lines:

> The fountain blows its breathless spray
> From me to you and back to me.

The trees are like "great jade elephants" and "the clouds are their crimson howdah-canopies." In a city at night, "the wind of the darkness whispered, Hush! to my soul." The "seeded grass" is "an army of little men crawling up the long slope with quivering, quick blades of steel." "The dancing dunes" are "labyrinths of shifting sand." And the poet's happiness is like the sand: "I let it run out of my hand." Addressing a child, his vision embraces infinitude in four lines:

> Strange, old, and silent being, there is something
> Infinitely vast in your intense tininess:
> I think you could point out, with a smile, some curious star
> Far off in the heavens, which no man has seen before.

Walking the nocturnal town, the poet remembers only a "gaudy, shameless night-orchid," which he prefers to "the feeble forget-me-nots of the world." The orchid was alive, "when all the rest were but puppets of the night." These poems are anything but sexless. And Fletcher, intensely serious though he is, is never too serious for dancing:

> I drink of the red bowl of the sunlight:
> I swim through seas of rain:
> I dig my toes into earth:
> I taste the smack of the wind:
> I am myself:
> I live.

This Southern poet owes more to Whitman than he does to the French or the Oriental. He is not as democratic as Walt; he is a lover of jungles, of an almost inhuman god, of asperities and solitudes. His soul is "a gorge that was filled with the warring echoes of song."

Of the eleven color symphonies, the Blue, the Green and the White are apparently the best. The other colors are black and gold, golden, white and blue, orange, red, violet, gray, scarlet.

The movements are short, embryonic; sonatas and sonatinas rather than symphonies. It is hard to sift a meaning out of the sunken gardens, autumnal leaves and sombre pools of the "Blue Symphony." There is a wistful longing for death in the last movement, for "those blue death-mountains I have forgot so long." "The glittering leaves of the rhododendrons" set the key of the "Green Symphony." The movement is swifter, lighter, the mood more animated. The last movement leads into a forest of pines, where the wind blows like "the crash of a perpetual sea." "I sway to the movement of hooded summits." In his solitude, the poet's ecstasy mounts to the majestic final cadence: "These are tombs and memorials and temples and altars sun-kindled for me." In the "White Symphony," immense peonies seize the imagination, "whorls of purity about a golden chalice." Here is the inmost spirit of the poet:

> Towards the impossible,
> Towards the inaccessible,
> Towards the ultimate,
> Towards the silence,
> Towards the eternal,
> These blossoms go.

Snow images join the floral images. A note of despair intervenes: "Boredom of fresh creation, death-weariness of old returns."

> White blossom or white snow scattered,
> And beneath them, dark, the graves.
> Dark groves never changing,
> White dream drifting, never changing above them;
> O that the white scroll of heaven might be rolled up,
> And the naked red lightning thrust at the smouldering earth!

In the later volumes, "The Tree Of Life," "Breakers And Granite," "Branches Of Adam," "The Black Rock," the mystic visions of Fletcher become intensified through a fiercer, more intimate warfare on the forces of reality. During the last ten years, the poet has penetrated beyond the self-imposed restraints of Imagism. Through an ever-increasing interest in his native

soil, he is now swayed by humanity, without, however, being able to rid himself of his loneliness. Something of the old savage clings to him still, but the savage has grown simpler, more concrete, more conscious of things outside the ego. He is just as impassioned as ever, but the passion has mellowed, without growing soft. He is just as prophetic, but the biblical tone no longer sounds so remote. Unable to master his idealism or compromise with a middle course, he does not yet accept life or humanity, here or anywhere else, just as they are. There is too much evil abroad, evil he cannot accept. He continues to thunder away like an old Calvinist. His jeremiads attack the earth of his ancestors, and of his own time. Nothing could be more sweeping than the denunciatory lines of "To A Survivor Of The Flood." Rhyme makes an entrance with poignant drum-beat. The flood is not the flood of old, but a modern flood, with but one survivor, a "Titan standing on wrecked peaks upright, Olympus piled on Sinai." This Titan, grown Everyman, is harangued with fiery symbols of dissolution:

> Will you speed forth on some chance lava flow
> Torn from a ruined sun you do not know,
> Towards a state no human tongue can tell
> After wrecked heaven has fallen below dead hell?
> Or will you sink down sluggishly within,
> Dropping below the waters cheek and chin,
> And last of all, now nevermore to rise,
> The huge unspeaking orbits of your eyes?
> Will you rest rotting darkly in that sea,
> To an eternity of vacancy?

This is no longer the spirit of Whitman, but a recrudescence of the darker genius of the misanthropic Melville. And yet, like Whitman, Lowell, Markham, Robinson, Lindsay, Sandburg, this poet, in the midst of whatever hatred or despair he may feel concerning his race, was moved by Lincoln. One of the noblest tributes to the all-saving Rail-splitter is Fletcher's. He compares Lincoln to a pine:

> Ungainly, labouring, huge,
> The wind of the north has twisted and gnarled its branches;

Yet in the heat of midsummer days, when thunder-clouds ring the horizon,
A nation of men shall rest beneath its shade.

Like Robinson, Fletcher goes back to the days when Lincoln was held in doubt:

But he whom we mocked and obeyed not, he whom we scorned and mistrusted,
He has descended, like a god, to his rest.

Fletcher calls for flowers to be strewn over the grave: Northern forget-me-nots, Eastern arbutus, Western orange blossoms and "from the heart of the land the passion-flower."

Rayed, violet, dim,
With the nails that pierced, the cross that he bore and the circlet,
And beside it there lay also one lonely snow-white magnolia,
Bitter for remembrance of the healing which has passed.

The Southern magnolia closes the poem, and bitterness for remembrance has spread throughout the land. The wiser Robinson saw that we can have but one Titan at a time. It is true of all races and all ages.

Of the other poems on American themes, those about the Southwest and the group called "Down The Mississippi" belong to the Imagistic period. "Granite And Breakers" contains most of the rugged poems. Somehow, the poet is more at home among cosmic vistas and among his modern versions of biblical scenes. "The Creation And Fall" from "Branches Of Adam" is a blending of fable and fact set to a powerful swiftness of movement and intensity of design. The poem is weakened by lapses from the opening fortissimo trumpets. There is too much fortissimo, too much orotundity. Nuances, where nuances would have aided the unfolding tale, are too rare. Fletcher is not a dramatist, but a rhapsodist. Yet the poem teems with moving emotions and images. And Adam, like Miss Branch's Nimrod, is the hero of the old days. "Lazarus" is an even finer poem, though equally awkward at times. It is divided into eleven movements: the awakening, his attempt to remember his former life, his quest of the Preacher

who had saved him, his encounter with Jesus and the thieves on the way to the Crucifixion, a mob scene, Golgotha, the visit to Joseph's tomb, and little by little, the mistaken recognition of Lazarus as Christ risen from the tomb. Fletcher's own faith in the Savior is intoned in a simple song: "Advent." But the poet's mysticism is most appealing when addressed directly to Nature, as in "Autumnal Clouds." This is a superb chant, the song of a modern Solomon:

> Autumnal clouds,
> Look! far there in the sunlight.
> The glory floods you now, I see you plainly:
> You are no more clouds to me, you are a woman,
> White and rosy and gold and blue and beautiful.
> You move across the sky, the dusk is at your feet,
> The night is in your arms, the moon is on your breast,
> The stars are in your eyes, the dawn is on your hair.
> Drench me, drown me, darken me, make me
> drunken with deep red torrents of joy,
> Till I forget all things in the world but this,
> The glory of God everlasting, the fire of passion and death.

XXI

SPRINGFIELD, SPOON RIVER AND THE PRAIRIES

I've been to Palestine.
What did you see in Palestine?
Vachel Lindsay.

AMONG the many paradoxes confronting the lover of American poetry, none is more delightful than the analogy to be drawn between such dissimilar pioneers as Pound and Lindsay. In 1906, two years before Pound raced abroad in search of strange foreign cultures, a young man, born near the Governor's mansion in Springfield, Ill., started out on an apostolic mission through Southern states, tramping from place to place, carrying little money and less baggage, and trading rhymes and reproductions of pictures for a meal or an overnight bed. Nothing quite as quixotic had ever been conceived by the mind of an American—unless one knows how quixotic Americans are. The mission was no mere impulse, carried out at random and discarded. It became an undertaking which drove the visionary vagabond all over the American map, chanting his verses and leaving his pamphlets at house doors. The house doors ultimately gave way to stages, the stages to huge auditoriums. Six or seven years after the corn-fed Middle-Westerner had begun preaching the gospel of beauty to Southern farmers, he caught the ear of the nation, and has been wooing that ear ever since. Any one who has ever heard and seen the chanting, roaring, soft-breathing, syncopated cyclone knows why the nation responded. I first heard him in 1912, in the Wanamaker Auditorium, then our proudest department store. The impression has never evaporated.

For an account of his early days, one may turn to Lindsay's "Adventures While Preaching The Gospel Of Beauty" and

"The Golden Book Of Springfield." Here one discovers that the huge Main Street movement did not begin with Sinclair Lewis, but in the child-like heart of the dreamer. Nor is the Lindsay street an authentic fact, as it is with Lewis and his school. Lewis and Mencken see the street as it is; Lindsay views it as it should be. It is possible that the pamphleteer, despite his incredible romanticism, is closer to ultimate truths than the naturalists are. Incredible men and women have risen out of the meanest of our populations; every other artist of recent years has sprung from the Middle-West. They may have risen out of protest—that dynamic motivator—but they must have had creative germs at the root of their iconoclasm. Lindsay was thrilled by a positive force; his irresistible confidence in art (he had begun life as an art student) carried everything before him. Born in the city of Lincoln, he was the modern American who builds from the soil, out of the crudest materials, and against the most hostile conditions. A man had to be blind to work under such hardships—blind or visionary. Lindsay was both: blind to temporal things and alive to horizons. The horizons he saw and still sees may be the absurdest of windmills. Present-day logic may show them for what they are and deride his old slogans: "The Village Improvement Parade"; "Fair Streets are Better than Silver; Green Parks are Better than Gold"; "Ugliness is a kind of Mis-government." In the light of subsequent developments, whose mechanized standardization and Rotarianism have turned our up-to-date towns into rows upon rows of identical monstrosities, the poet's slogans seem frightfully funny, his poems hopelessly antiquated. In the same mood, people laugh at that tragic dreamer, Don Quixote. Sancho Panza Mencken laughs loudest of all, but the dreamers may yet have the last laugh. Vachel Lindsay, a great admirer of Lewis and Mencken, is not without a sense of humor. The humor is queer and fanatical; nor has it grown. Some day, some descendant of his, more a man and less a child, will fashion a weapon made of the head and heart: laughter conceived of love will show Sancho Panza his place in the scheme of American civilization.

In contradiction to these assertions, one has to admit that the worst poems Lindsay has written are the ones concerning his gospel, and the best those in which he was solely concerned with poetry. Here is where his kinship with Cousin Ezra enters. Pound, the pamphleteer and pedant, has spent a lifetime trying to cultivate America through what he considers the classics; his appeal has been intellectual. Lindsay went straight to the masses, like a socialistic orator, and harangued the mob from metaphoric soap-boxes. Pound has attacked his subjects via Europe, a Europe of the troubadours; Lindsay turned troubadour himself, "a higher vaudevillian," and carried his one-ring circus to unknown doors in unknown places. His appeal was a direct appeal to the emotions. His is a folk art, Pound's a cultivated. In spending so much of their energies in educating the lower or upper classes, the poetry of both men has declined. Like Pound, Lindsay, during the past ten years, has written nothing comparable with his work of the first ten. Still, one cannot say the final word on either poet until the final poems have been written. Many obituaries have been read over Lindsay in recent years. It is a popular pastime among critics, also among his friends. Aiken buried him completely ten years ago, and buried "The Congo" with him. I fail to see why a poet's decline is symptomatic of his entire career. Every artist declines at some time; whether he does it sooner or later means little. Some men who began beside Lindsay may write better verse than he does now; but what they write now is inferior to his former work. He may have sung his song, but what a song it was and is. The pro-American has nearly destroyed Lindsay as the anti-American has nearly destroyed Pound. Both factors are essential to any man, but they must not engulf him. Tedious though the slogan, art for art's sake, one needs to be reminded that the muse demands poetry of men. In indicating the vices which have well-nigh conquered two of our leading idealists, vices born as virtues, one does not urge Lindsay and Pound to drop their old weapons for good. On his deathbed, Don Quixote was completely disillusioned about his career.

Death showed him how paltry, how unreal was his quest—the most tragic scene in all classic fiction. But the failure of the skinny knight, if failure it was, looms very large in perspective. He was, as Unamuno has shown, the very heart of Spain. And he is the very heart of humanity. That old-fashioned organ is still the root of all races. No matter how absurd its capers, no man can live without it, give anything without it, or be remembered with honor by his fellows.

Between 1905 and '13, Lindsay issued eight pamphlets and booklets. All but "A Handy Guide For Beggars" were privately printed, beginning with "The Tree Of Laughing Bells." "General William Booth Enters Heaven" came out in 1913 and "The Congo" the following year. At intervals of three years, they were followed by "The Chinese Nightingale," "The Golden Whales Of California," "Collected Poems," and, in 1926, "The Candle In The Cabin" and "Going-To-The-Stars." The year before, Lindsay went back to his first love: making pictures. He has illustrated the collected poems and the two later volumes. From time to time, further prose books and pamphlets have appeared: the latest patriotic venture is called "The Litany Of Washington Street." Most of the poems in the books of late years do not maintain the form of the earlier days. The gist, the kernel, the child-heart of the poet, is in the first four volumes. In turning back to the Booth volume, one is annoyed with notes of sentimentality characteristic of a man who refuses to grow up—a habit with most Americans. The movies won an early champion in Lindsay. "The Congo" contains poems to Mary Pickford, who has always refused to grow up and whose public would desert her if she did; and to Blanche Sweet, an incomparable artist of the films. In 1915, the poet wrote a book on "The Art Of The Motion Picture." Having seen quite a number of beautiful things on the screen, one cannot quarrel with Lindsay. But one does take exception to the kind of eternal adolescence which hampers not alone the emotional American, but likewise the intellectual. We shall see later on, when the intellectual movement set in as a reaction against the

emotional, how determined its practitioners were never to graduate from the schools in which they were nurtured. The leading intellectual adolescent is Thomas Stearns Eliot.

Adolescence is refreshing in the young and thoroughly refreshing in the best of the early Lindsay. But there is little of this in the Booth book with its ardent campaign against sin and vice, the saloon, gambling, prostitution, etc. The title poem is a ragtime glorification of the leader of the Salvation Army. Wine of the air is preferred to the wine of Omar Khayyám. And Queen Honor is held to be the most spotless of women. And the country road is raised above the felonious town—always excepting the magical hometown, Springfield. And King Arthur's men and Cromwell's men and Lincoln's men are shown pursuing the cause of God on earth. And Christ is addressed as "Star of my heart," and the Virgin is invoked:

> "Sweet Mary, make me clean,
> Thou rainstorm of the soul,
> Thou wine from worlds unseen."

And the poet would wake the St. Francis in us all, "God's Troubadour." It is all heartily naïve, and amazingly like the old Sunday School tracts and the first motion pictures. Virtue shall prevail over vice and so on. And he votes the Socialist ticket in order "to heal our everlasting sinfulness." And, incongruously, there is a poem in praise of Edgar Allan Poe:

> He found the gutter, lost to love and man.
> Too slowly came the good Samaritan.

Then one turns the page to the stirring poem on John P. Altgeld: "The Eagle That Is Forgotten." A little later, fantasies and whims troop in. Here is the delightful potato dance, with its echolalia out of Poe. Here are the four sweethearts, spring, summer, autumn, winter, the playmate boys and girls, the earliest of the famous moon poems—"How different people and different animals look upon the moon: showing that each creature finds in it his own mood and disposition." On the whole, a few of the whimsies and the Altgeld and Booth poems are the only distinctive pieces in the book. The title poem is a vivid

parade of the slums responding to Booth leading "boldly with his big bass drum," and of the Salvationist crowned by Christ. The syncopated rhythm is a triumphant success. The directions to the band, printed in italics down the page, are an Americanized version of a scheme employed by Coleridge.

This device is developed in the later volumes, especially in "The Congo," that extraordinary study of the negro. Here, Poe's echolalia is carried many degrees beyond "The Bells" and "Ulalume":

> Fat black bucks in a wine-barrel room,
> Barrel-house kings, with feet unstable,
> Sagged and reeled and pounded on the table,
> Pounded on the table,
> Beat an empty barrel with the handle of a broom,
> Hard as they were able,
> Boom, boom, BOOM,
> With a silk umbrella and the handle of a broom,
> Boomlay, boomlay, boomlay, BOOM.

In this blending of realism, grotesquerie and rhythm, Lindsay stands alone. The vision of the Congo, "creeping through the black," with its thousand miles of "tattooed cannibals," the "blood-lust song," "and a thigh-bone beating on a tin-pan gong," is the work of a man inspired by negro camp meetings, voodoos and vaudeville. Williams and Walker never strutted a grander cake walk than the second movement, in which the "irresistible high spirits" of the negro are revealed. The third movement, "the hope of their religion," sings "glory, glory, glory" to the death of "Mumbo-Jumbo, God of the Congo." One feels the gathering frenzy of a revival meeting where all sinners are redeemed by the Bible, the book they beat till they wear it out. There have been countless imitations of "The Congo," by white folk, black folk, poets, playwrights, novelists. Lindsay's is still the nonpareil.

"The Santa-Fe Trail," "a humoresque" on a totally different theme, is fully as persuasive. It is a sardonic attack on the endless line of autos traversing the American continent. The ode descends to the utmost buffoonery—

Here comes the *dice*-horn, here comes the *vice*-horn,
Here comes the *snarl*-horn, *brawl*-horn, *lewd*-horn,
Followed by the *prude*-horn, bleak and squeaking . . .

and the same device is employed for the delicate—

Hark to the *calm*-horn, *balm*-horn, *psalm*-horn.
Hark to the *faint*-horn, *quaint*-horn, *saint*-horn.

The echolalia is effective so long as it conveys a meaning; otherwise it grows hollow and tedious. Each car shooting westward flaunts a "snapping pennant" of "the careering city whence each car came." We are instructed to chant the Whitmanesque catalogues "like a train-caller in a Union depot—"

While I sit by the milestone
And watch the sky,
The United States
Goes by.

The poet is lolling in Kansas. In the midst of the racket, a bird some negro has called, the Rachel Jane,

Not defeated by the horns
Sings amid a hedge of thorns:—
"Love and life,
Eternal youth—
Sweet, sweet, sweet, sweet,
Dew and glory,
Love and truth,
Sweet, sweet, sweet, sweet."

The bird is Vachel himself, reduced to the faintest pianissimo, and typical child-like moral. Ultimately, the song is taken over by the prairie fairies. Critics have complained that no one but Lindsay can render the musical effects of such odes: they are program music or program poetry. An artist who has to borrow from the other arts to support his own may weaken his case; but there is no reason why the reader cannot learn to scan these pages as he might a musical score. It is a difficult task, but the poet is worthy of the effort. He has, to be sure, no accurate means of transcription, as the musician has or the writer of traditional metres. To the poet's further disadvantage, the

average reader refuses to use his own imagination. He expects the artist to do all the work, to make the reading easy. Given a perfect musical score, how many pianists can read into and out of it, the full spirit of the composer? Not even professional pianists agree in their interpretations, and it is well they do not. Something must be left to the individual imagination. If each poet were to write in accordance with his predecessors, poetry would die of monotony. He has to break the rules—passionately, intelligently and intelligibly. Lindsay often falls down between the last two adverbs. Thought is not one of his virtues.

The rest of the volume is given over to further propaganda: a poem for the maintenance of peace with Japan; a rhyme about an electrical sign, closing on the ludicrous slogan:

> The signs in the streets and the signs in the skies
> Shall make a new Zodiac, guiding the wise,
> And Broadway make one with that marvelous stair
> That is climbed by the rainbow-clad spirits of prayer.

This is as far-fetched as the sentimental ballads of the New York Nineties. By contrast, we turn to a truly great lyric: "The Leaden-Eyed." Here is a call to the world to let youth grow:

> Not that they starve, but starve so dreamlessly,
> Not that they sow, but that they seldom reap,
> Not that they serve, but have no gods to serve,
> Not that they die, but that they die like sheep.

The twenty poems on the moon are inimitable. No American, not even Eugene Field, has written such juvenile poems. They are tender, playful, nonsensical, fantastic, absurd, wise. Here is a good antidote against the endless tribe of Cynthia's poetasters:

> No man should stand before the moon
> To make sweet song thereon,
> With dandified importance,
> His sense of humor gone.

The outstanding poem of the group is that exquisite ballad, "Aladdin And The Jinn." Of the 1914 war-poems which

close the volume, one is worthy of memory: "Abraham Lincoln Walks At Midnight."

In the remaining volumes, the best of the ballads are: "A Negro Sermon: Simon Legree," "The Ghosts Of The Buffaloes," "The Chinese Nightingale," "The Daniel Jazz," "John Brown," "In Praise Of Johnny Appleseed," "I Know All This When Gipsy Fiddles Cry." They were composed over ten years ago. The Legree poem, based on "Uncle Tom's Cabin," is a delightfully villainous affair. The old slave-driver in his brass-buttoned coat, snake-skin tie and blood-red shirt is opulently painted by the darky preacher. There is only one place the villain is welcome: at the side of the Devil in Hell:

> They are matching pennies and shooting craps,
> They are playing poker and taking naps.
> And old Legree is fat and fine:
> He eats the fire, he drinks the wine—
> Blood and burning turpentine . . .

"The Daniel Jazz" is related to Simon Legree. It is quite as grotesque and amusing. Darius the Mede plays the villain:

> He kept bad lions in a monstrous den.
> He fed up the lions on Christian men.

The Jazz opens with energy, but the inspiration droops fairly soon. Lindsay urges the singer to "train the audience to roar like lions." The effect is entirely silly—not even the poet could carry it off. A finer negro ballad, doubtless the finest of all, is "John Brown." I have heard the poet train an audience in the communal chant, "What did you see in Palestine?" and heard him respond with the simple, sonorous rhythms of a negro divine.

"The Chinese Nightingale," "a song in Chinese tapestries," is dedicated to Sara Teasdale. The charm of the poem is marred by a sentimentalized portrait of a San Francisco laundryman ironing the night away and dreaming of the princess who once made him the king of men. The Chinaman is a figment of fancy. "In Praise Of Johnny Appleseed" is a folk ballad on the life of John Chapman, the eccentric who, during Washington's

time, planted appleseeds in waste places—"Yankee Doodle his marching song." Johnny's future orchards are food for the poet's patriotism:

> An angel in each apple that touched the forest mold,
> A ballot-box in each apple,
> Great high schools, great colleges,
> All America in each apple,
> Each red, rich, round, and bouncing moon
> That touched the forest mold.

Here the best and the worst of Lindsay move side by side. The ballad of the gypsy fiddles is melodious, except for an excursion into Chicago, with its library, orchestra and Fine Arts Building literally interpolated, and a later excursion in search of the "princess in a forest-tale" promised to the poet by gypsy girls who have read his palm. A vagabond himself, the poet is at home with the Romany. The ballad is characteristically uneven. Never was a poet more in need of self-criticism. The opening stanza is a gorgeous vision the remaining stanzas fail to carry through:

> Oh, gipsies, proud and stiff-necked and perverse,
> Saying: "We tell the fortunes of the nations,
> And revel in the deep palm of the world.
> The head-line is the road we choose for trade.
> The love-line is the lane wherein we camp.
> The life-line is the road we wander on.
> Mount Venus, Jupiter, and all the rest
> Are finger-tips of ranges clasping round
> And holding up the Romany's wide sky."

Rarely does Lindsay sustain a ballad from beginning to end. "The Ghosts Of The Buffaloes" is a decided exception: a work of sheer vision and ecstasy. The poet rises "at black midnight" in the midst of a thunderstorm, and rushing to the dooryard finds that his city is gone. Ghost-kings come riding along, "Gods of the Indians, torches aglow," on the backs of bear, elk, deer, long-horn cattle and "eagles gigantic." They are followed by the marvelous rank and file,

> Gibbering, yipping, with hollow-skull clacks,
> Riding white bronchos with skeleton backs,

Scalp-hunters, beaded and spangled and bad,
Naked and lustful and foaming and mad . . .
Power and glory that sleep in the grass
While the winds and the snows and the great rains pass.

They ride "in infinite lines to the west: the blue was their home." The Indians are followed by "royal old buffaloes," "the lords of the prairie," likewise sweeping westward. The herd is magnificently described. Suddenly, silence ensues. The poet hears "a cricket's cymbals play," a scarecrow flap his rags. And "the wind in the chimney . . . seemed to say":

"Dream, boy, dream,
If you anywise can.
To dream is the work
Of beast or man.
Life is the west-going dream-storm's breath,
Life is a dream, the sigh of the skies . . ."

Finally, he hears the cricket say: "Good-night, good-night, good-night, good-night, . . . good-night."

And the moralist, poet and vagabond must have gone back to sleep, to dream of a further America, an America to which he still devotes his child-heart-and-soul, an America which has outgrown and passed by its once darling Lindsay. The sun of his former popularity shines elsewhere. Weary of optimists, emotion and romance, we now seek out scientists, intellectuals and "hard-boiled eggs." America is always new, new in no time. And the old grows old overnight. Lindsay already belongs among the ghosts of the plains, "the royal old buffaloes" gone to the blue. Life is no dream to the present generation, but a downright fact, a wretched fact. Among the grand things the war swept away, it swept away Vachel Lindsay. The world is disillusioned: "The heart has gone out of the thing." And the child-heart most of all. We are at the dawn of another adolescence. Even the intellectuals and "eggs," so superior to the past, refuse to grow up. Most of them seem less alive than Lindsay used to be. The best of his mad poetry still lives for those of us who live in the past—and also in the future. . . .

Springfield, Spoon River and the Prairies

Edgar Lee Masters, born the same year as Robinson and ten years the senior of Lindsay, is perhaps the most tragic figure in modern American poetry. At the age of forty-five—quite an old age for a poet—he issued the "Spoon River Anthology," a tour de force that succeeded where a twenty-year blundering siege of classical poetry had failed. An offspring of Kansas and a successful lawyer in Chicago, the poet had issued five volumes on classical themes reduced to vapid pomposities, and, since the days of 1914, has issued seven or eight further volumes which have received less and less praise and the most forthright disapprobation. From the inanities of his blank verse drama on Benedict Arnold down to his latest battle with some quasi immortal subject, Masters' poetic industry has been phenomenal and his triumph comparatively infinitesimal. At heart, he is an analytic realist who achieved one great success, but never a single great poem. Nowadays, the Anthology's poetic claims have grown rather dubious. It was a work of unquestioned originality, the first to encompass a Mid-Western community, and the forerunner of a distinguished series of small-town fictions beginning with Anderson's "Winesburg, Ohio," and Lewis' "Main Street" and "Babbitt." In contrast to Lindsay's golden vision of the small town, it was drab and contactual. It unearthed the Spoon River cemetery, brought people back to life and reburied them. It let people tell truths about themselves they had never spoken while alive. This was, and still is, the original vein of the book. Beyond that vein, it contributed little to American poetry, a great deal to American prose. Its speech, for the most part, was true to character, and had the beneficent effect of forcing poets to write in terms of actuality. But the old rhetorician in Masters recaptured Masters the realist: most of his writing since has been an extension of the pseudo classical. Two Yankees had surpassed him in the art of employing human speech: Robinson in "Tilbury," Frost in "North Of Boston." And his colleague and friend, Carl Sandburg, also left him far behind.

Even "Spoon River" did not escape the rhetorical past. Vestiges of the poet's prodigious reading clung to some of the

portraits and distorted their naturalism. Several fine elements contrived to bring Masters to face the life he knew as a lawyer. First of all, William Marion Reedy, the Buddha of St. Louis, who had rejected Masters' poetry year after year, urged him to read "The Greek Anthology": the noblest remains of antiquity, and the inspirational source of poets of many races. Secondly, the advent of Pound and the Imagists gave him clews to the form in which to model his portraits. I have heard that the first portraits were written as parodies of Imagism. Lastly, the friendship of Harriet Monroe, the pioneer editor, and of Carl Sandburg, poet of the people, helped Masters' uncertain self-confidence. The first four sketches came out in *Reedy's Mirror* on the eve of Decoration Day, 1914. Reedy clamored for more —so did the country at large. The wise old editor had shown his friend that all great literature is racy—especially "The Greek Anthology"—and the poet-lawyer turned to cross-examining life at first hand. The cross-examination rarely achieved the synthesis of absolute poetry. But it had the deep virtue, at a time when such virtue was needed, of stripping Americans of their self-delusion. They now saw themselves not as a community of helpful democrats, devoted to the loftiest ideals, but as a heterogeneous clan of weaklings, fakers, egoists, lovers, haters, hypocrites, little men and women. The severity of the dose was a tonic to the self-complacent consciousness. Americans swallowed the dose and yammered for more. The book enjoyed an unprecedented popularity. The lines were divided, to be sure; they looked like poetry; but the speech was human and prosaic. Anyone could read it and everybody did. In truth, most of the poems were divided prose, prose divided into fairly equal lines. Anderson's Winesburg tales, though written as prose, are closer to poetry. A proseman wrote "Spoon River"; a poet wrote Winesburg.

The poems of "The Greek Anthology," many of them anonymous, extend across fifteen centuries, beginning about 500 B.C. One may assume that every Occidental poet and many an Oriental, whether he has read the originals, read them in translation or not read them at all, has come under their

influence. John Addington Symonds has stated, "the true secret of their charm is this; that in their couplets, after listening to the choric raptures of triumphant public art, we turn aside to hear the private utterances, the harmoniously modulated whispers of a multitude of Greek poets telling us their inmost thoughts and feelings." The poet often takes on the character of one deceased and speaks in his name. The poet is then an anonymous dramatic lyrist: the part Masters plays toward the people in his cemetery. The triumph of his anthology reposes in the created characters and in their private and public relations to a common social scheme. His book is no "*Comédie Humaine*," as critics confidently hailed it. Masters is no Balzac. But the book is a novel or play in miniature, thoroughly indigenous to Mid-Western soil. One need not revert to "The Greek Anthology" to see where "Spoon River" fails as poetry; one consults Masters' contemporary, Robinson, and the poems of "Tilbury Town." Or if one wishes to compare Masters with a younger contemporary, one need but turn to the reincarnation of "The Greek Anthology" in H. D. Each of these Americans owes much to the old book, and all three created their own forms. Robinson and Hilda Doolittle perfected theirs; Masters left his unfinished.

Consider a few translations and adaptations of the original Greek. Here is the Spoon River spirit in two lines:

> Dion of Tarsus, here I lie, who sixty years have seen.
> I was not ever wed, and would my father had not been!

Or consider Cowper's version of an anonymous quatrain:

> Poor in my youth, and in life's later scenes
> Rich to no end, I curse my natal hour,
> Who nought enjoyed while young, denied the means:
> And nought when old enjoyed, denied the power.

Here is an entire biography, personal and universal, concise and musical. And in "Paulus Silentarius," Cowper found the tale common to all nonentity:

> My name, my country, what are they to thee?
> What, whether proud or base my pedigree?

Perhaps I far surpassed all other men;
Perhaps I fell below them all. What then?
Suffice it, stranger, that thou seest a tomb.
Thou knowst its use. It hides—no matter whom.

The Anthology contains every conceivable person, mood and thing. So, within its confines, does "Spoon River." In approaching his imaginary graves, Masters proceeded correctly: he studied the lives of his neighbors, listened to their speech and molded it into a modern American form. The Imagists were too deeply immersed in foreign themes and idioms. Masters decided to bring the idioms home, as Sandburg had done. But Sandburg knew how to sing, Masters did not. He may have argued with himself: my people cannot sing: it would be romantic, sentimental, to make them do so in print. He was probably right in this. But he was wrong in inferring that since most of these people were dolts, rather than artists, they were unworthy of the completest artistry in their biographer. What is any biographer if he fails in artistry? Masters did not fail in all the portraits, but he failed in too many. His book is a remarkable set of documents, far below the poetry it would have become had a genius approached the graves.

In "Petit, The Poet," Masters, obviously speaking for the character, makes an attack on classical metres: "Seeds in a dry pod, tick, tick, tick . . . while Homer and Whitman roared in the pines!" He despises the "little iambics" he had once employed and plunges into free verse. Now and then, his free verse is acceptable, though it seldom sounds like an inevitable form. Poe, filching a leaf from Coleridge on Wordsworth, would have reset the verse in paragraphs and called it "respectable prose." Masters has given up rhythm along with metre. Certain of his lines are rhythmic, the next few heavy-footed:

I went to the dances at Chandlerville,
And played snap-out at Winchester.
One time we changed partners,
Driving home in the moonlight of middle June,
And then I found Davis.

This is one of the greatly admired poems in "Spoon River." Lucinda, the speaker, marries Davis; they live together for seventy years, raise twelve children, of whom they lose eight. Lucinda kept house right down to ninety-six, "and passed to a sweet repose." She concludes:

> What is this I hear of sorrow and weariness,
> Anger, discontent and drooping hopes?
> Degenerate sons and daughters,
> Life is too strong for you—
> It takes life to love Life.

The poem should have closed with the penultimate line and spared us the final banality. One admires the old lady and respects her pioneer life, but one simply does not feel it. The speech lacks emotional power; it sounds transcribed, unreal; one stands outside the character. "Spoon River's" introductory poem, reminiscent of Emerson, has a finer melodic line than most of the epitaphs, and gains its effectiveness through concise memories of the village dead caught in the refrain: "All, all, are sleeping on the hill." Other poems in which the rhythm is more marked are, "Hare Drummer," "Doc Hill," "Perry Zoll," "Father Malloy," "Arlo Will," "Anne Rutledge." But the first, after a natural sequence of cadences, drops into an antique inversion:

> Do the boys and girls still go to Siever's
> For cider, after school, in late September?
> Or gather hazel nuts among the thickets
> On Aaron Hatfield's farm when the frosts begin?
> For many times with the laughing girls and boys
> Played I along the road and over the hills . . .

There is scarcely a poem which does not suffer from some such awkward moment. It is untrue to spontaneous human speech. One never finds such absurdities in Sandburg. Any man with a sensitive ear can detect unconscious rhythms in the speech of people under a potent emotion. As a rule, Masters' ear is insensitive. He is a lover of truth, an excellent story teller without an instinct for beauty. One does not ask for lovely lines

liltingly presented. These are untrue and unbeautiful. But, in the light of poems about people in "The Greek Anthology," in English balladry, in Cowper, Burns and Wordsworth, in Robinson, Frost and Sandburg, the "Spoon River" poems sound flat and even unreal. The poet created a formula and applied it to the people of a typical pioneer village. One feels the extrinsic formula, too rarely the intrinsic form of the characters. Unhappily for Masters, other men applied his discoveries to their poetry and prose. "Spoon River" has been outmoded by the books it inspired. And the subsequent books of Masters have never caught up with the books of his disciples.

The lawyer-poet has most of the elements of a writer, but few of those essential to an artist. No one American book contains a larger abundance of varied human material than "Spoon River." The human race is there in embryo. The book has lost its fascination because other books, stirred by similar American problems, have achieved a deeper realism through an appeal to the esthetic imagination. One does not object to the "ugly" lines in "Spoon River." One was heartily grateful for their arrival in literature. No country ever needed them more. One objected and still objects to the way most of the lines were handled by the author. He was truthful, but not truthful enough. He saw and recorded many sides and relations, irrelations, heroisms, deceits, humors, tragedies, ignominious defeats and victories. He brought to his task the reasoning eye of a lawyer, the clean scalpel of a surgeon, the bitter heart of a fellow being. Perhaps the heart was too bitter; perhaps it is bitter still. Listening to the bitter heartbeat of others, it heard but its own imagined echoes. The eye and ear did not achieve objectivity. The ugliest life can reach beauty if the subject is treated objectively. The artist has felt, understood and molded his people faithfully. The man may start with hatred and bitterness—both are superb motivators. Emerson confesses that he could rarely sit down to work unless he was stirred by some ill humor. But the humor disappeared in the course of what he was writing. One does not ask for the other extreme: our land is overrun with genial authors. One merely demands all humors in an

author, none to the exclusion of others. All are finally wedded in the artist. We cannot ask his personality to vanish; ask him to change it for one more sympathetic to our own, and our view of life and humanity. We wait for the man to develop nothing but himself, and to develop it to the fullest reaches hinted at in his earliest promise. "Spoon River" was an earnest of a great poet to come, a poet comparable with Whitman. That poet has never come out of Edgar Lee Masters. If Walt's successor arrives, he will owe a good deal to "Spoon River," and to the other pioneer books of the era. One turns from the visionary Lindsay, blind to all but his vision, from the realistic Masters, awake to all but beauty, to a poet who combines reality and romance, truth and beauty, speech and song: Carl Sandburg. It may be too early to pronounce him the man Whitman called for. He is great in at least one thing: he is the foremost singer the pioneer West has given us. He sums up the past, present and future of the America he was born in. And he is an artist from his bootsoles to his fingertips. . . .

In 1914, Harriet Monroe's *Poetry* issued a group of poems by a stranger named Carl Sandburg. It included the ode to the "Hog Butcher for the World," Chicago. A lanky galoot, with a bang over one eye, had finally arrived: he was thirty-six at the time. One recalls the violent sensation the group aroused. What right had any man to be so brutal in print, and what right had our most brutal city to such eulogies? How in the name of America could culture continue if it fell into the hands of Swedes and stevedores and picked up the slang of filthy Mid-Western pavements? And what was a poetry magazine doing out there in the jungles, with a woman, two women, at the head? The next thing the effete East had to hear was that Chicago had become the literary capital of the nation: egregious absurdity, scandalous braggadocio. But this terrible event had actually occurred, and New York had gone the way of Philadelphia and Boston. One man, more than any other, had been responsible for the catastrophe: this son of an emigrant Swede, this child of a place called Galesburg, this truck-handler, scene-

shifter, dish-washer, harvester, soldier and graduate of a college named Lombard. (Shades of John Harvard and Elihu Yale!) Then he wrote ads for a department store, became a Socialist, and a newspaperman. Whatever else he may have dropped, he never deserted the newspapers. What had all this to do with poetry—the poetry of Greece and so on? Absolutely nothing. But it had more to do with the new American poetry than the work of any other man since Whitman. Walt had declaimed against "ladylike words." A vigorous fellow had answered the call. In deleting such words, the strange poet had not eliminated tenderness. Here, then, was an odd mixture of fortissimi and pianissimi, with a musician at the core of both.

Here, too, was a practical, not a theoretical democrat: a romantic realist deeply moved by emotions, but intuitive enough to give them a plastic shape. He mastered the lyric forms for which he had gone to school with Pound and the Imagists. He never reached old Walt in the larger forms, but he surpassed the Imagists in the smaller. He humanized Imagism and tempered Walt's passionate creed with the salt of irony. One has a feeling that Sandburg is closer than Whitman to people as they are. He loves them as romantically, but not quite so blindly. Walt was the prophet of the race, Walt himself was democracy. Sandburg is the bard of the race, the lyric companion of its by no means perfect character. His speech is a rhythmic reflection of the raciest speech ever set singing by an American. Sandburg's poems are thoroughly melodious. Stark, brutal, tender, ironic, mystical, slangy, dramatic or reportorial, they are always melodious. Critics who praise him like to conclude that Sandburg is purely emotional; that his intellect is negligible. It may be limited for critical purposes, but in the more important domain of self-criticism, it is usually large enough. He has complete command of his emotions, the process of a man who thinks as well as feels. He will never qualify as an intellectual poet, simply because an intellectual experience does not suffice for Sandburg. At heart, he is a man of the streets, not of the studio. But the room he works in is the room of an artist. After the subconscious has poured forth its visions

and emotions, the conscious labors over the ultimate form. Matter and manner are beautifully wedded.

In "Chicago Poems," issued in 1916, loyalty to the poor is first sounded in "Masses": "more patient than crags, tides, and stars." Their fate is

> To work, broken and smothered, for bread and wages,
> To eat dust in their throats and die empty-hearted
> For a little handful of pay on a few Saturday nights.

Never merely propagandistic, this poetry is as potent as the most learned treatise on Socialism. Every other page, apparently, is devoted to the worker, and the best pages are the portraits, or such single lines as "How many cents for the sleepy eyes and fingers?" "The Fish Crier," "terribly glad to be selling fish"; ten men watching some sweating slaves and saying, "Oh, it's a hell of a job," and ten others sighing, "Jesus, I wish I had the job"; a "dago shovelman . . . eating a noon meal of bread and bologna," and keeping the road-bed clear so trains may whirl by with people eating steaks "running with brown gravy"; the bum who has married Mag and given her children, and now wishes to God he had never seen her; the Onion Days of Mrs. Gabrielle Giovannitti; Anna Imroth, a factory girl burned to death thanks to "the hand of God and the lack of fire escapes"; Mamie, dreaming of getting to Chicago, and once she is there, dreaming of places where real dreams never go to smash; "undertakers, hearse drivers, grave diggers" earning a living through "those who say good-bye to-day in thin whispers"; dynamiters, ice handlers, niggers, movie fans, skyscrapers; and the attack on the "contemporary bunkshooter," Billy Sunday:

> Where do you get that stuff?
> What do you know about Jesus?

And the poems written at the outbreak of the World War: "Killers," "Statistics," "Buttons," "Jaws," "Wars" and "Iron" —in which guns do the work of death and shovels the work of burial. And the exquisite etchings called "Handfuls," in which sentiment deftly plays, and also sentimentality. "The fog comes on little cat feet," and

Crimson is the slow smolder of the cigar end I hold,
Gray is the ash that stiffens and covers all silent the fire.

Here, round the corner of tumultuous life, is something beyond: the mystic Sandburg greeting "the dust of the traveled road," and praising a man who died alone: "And only the undertaker came to his funeral." Truth is "the most elusive captive in the universe." The poet simply hints at it; leaves it for his fellows to solve. Whatever little there may be, here or hereafter, there are "Fogs And Fires," "the coming of a little love," "a beautiful friend who remembers," a moon to "shake out more and more silver changes." "Summer and the sun commend you." There is even something for the women of the night: "It is much to be warm and sure of to-morrow." Better, surely, than the woman who has "no takers," or the one who confesses:

"Some men got it all,
Every night's hustlin' I ever did."

Then there are the closing poems, dated 1900 to 1910. Sandburg had written free verse before Pound sailed abroad:

I am glad God saw Death
And gave Death a job taking care of all who are tired of living.

"Cornhuskers" is a clear advance over "Chicago Poems." The adventures are broader, the imagination keener, the artistry more certain. The self has become mellowed through communion with the other fellow, mountains, plains, cities, civilization, barbarism; and through passion, tenderness, observation, humor, irony. Each plays its phrase in the tune that is Sandburg. "Prairie," the long opening poem, is composed of glorious patches and irreconcilable journalese. I feel the same contradiction in the other long poems: "The Four Brothers" and "Potato-Blossom Songs And Jigs." Sandburg is essentially a lyrist, and the lyrism is sporadically interrupted. He rarely sustains a theme at great length; in this he falls below Whitman.

The story lags.
The story has no connections.
The story is nothing but a lot of plinka planka plunks.

"River Roads" introduces Sandburg's skillful use of repetition; "Prairie Waters" his instinct for harmonious sensations of eye and ear; "Early Moon" his devotion to mysticism in a translation of the past in terms of the future. The wonder-breathing "Caboose Thoughts," "It's going to come out all right—do you know?" marches erect to the colloquial close: "They get along—and we'll get along." The Sandburg heaven is nothing but the common street seen upside down.

"Wilderness" is a symbol of many sided self-hood: his zoo contains wolf, fox, hog, fish, baboon, eagle and mocking-bird. Folk who grow soft with horror in the presence of egoism will find this blast distasteful. Individualists will frame it over their beds, lest they forget the refrain, "I came from the wilderness," and its visionary twin, "I am a pal of the world." In immediate contrast, comes "Chicago Poet": "I saluted a nobody—I saw him in a looking glass." An egoist knows himself so heartily that he has your true humility. Further "persons half known" include Nancy Hanks, Inez Milholland, Adelaide Crapsey, Don Magregor, "Southern Pacific" Huntington and "Southern Pacific" Blithery, Buffalo Bill, Jazbo the singing nigger, and Child Janet and Child Margaret, the two Sandburgians to whom the book is dedicated. The songs hobnob with a rogue's gallery of moods, in which the poet himself is one of the jail-bird cronies. In "Chicago Poet," he steps out of his cell for a sunny morning with his kind, and in "Jazbo," he goes back to the tune of, "I went away asking where I came from."

"Leather Leggings" shows man in his multifarious activity making "the ball of earth—a small thing." It is the history of science reduced to a poem. The same adventure rises out of "Prayers Of Steel," from "Lay me on an anvil, O God," to "Let me be the great nail holding a skyscraper through blue nights into white stars." The first group is the America of open spaces, this third group the America of cities. It is felt by an American, partly a Swede, and expressed in the American language, partly English: such is the inference in "Jabberers": "I rise out of the depths of my language." The title, "Psalm Of Those Who Go

Forth Before Daylight," explains itself. There are slants at many towns: Keokuk, Buffalo, the Springfield of Lincoln and Lindsay, Joliet, Natchez, New Orleans. "Testament" closes the group. It is cheerily addressed to "undertakers, the nanny and billy goats, the blue smoke of flowers and the dirty-fisted children" who have the disposal of Sandburg's remains in their keeping.

The fourth group, "Haunts," is a mellifluous love group. It is epitomized in the line: "To-day, let me be mono-syllabic . . . a crony of old men who wash sunlight in their fingers and enjoy slow-pacing clocks." "Mammy Hums" is as beautiful a thing as free verse has ever contributed to poetry; unless you prefer "Handfuls," a cameo of "baby-red gamblers" drifting on to "gray gamblers, handfuls again." The war group, "Shenandoah," is inferior to the other groups. Propaganda is a little too apparent. But "Old Timers" and the brutal "Gargoyle" are authentic art. The last speech in "Grass," "I am the grass, let me work," reveals the Sandburg song coming up through our future soil, when everyday poets and poetic controversy are laid away.

"Smoke And Steel," an even finer book than "Cornhuskers," is Sandburg's finest volume. The man and artist have reached maturity. The title poem is a vivid panorama of the building of cities through the blood of men: "Liners on the sea, skyscrapers on the land; diving steel in the sea, climbing steel in the sky."

> A bar of steel—it is only
> Smoke at the heart of it, smoke and the blood of a man.

Smoke carries the poet's vision beyond reality. He is more obsessed with searching the unknown, and though he comes back empty-handed, he returns to the quest, marching and chanting:

> You may put the damper up,
> You may put the damper down,
> The smoke goes up the chimney just the same.

Here, for almost the first time, is an acceptance of machinery and its implications: "smoke into steel and blood into steel." No man knows more about the horror of factory cells, the tor-

tured slavery of labor. No man hates injustice with a fiercer hatred; he is no pallid intellectual. Holding constant conversations with death, he knows what it is after, and greets the end of the World War by noting a "rusty gun on the wall."

> It will be spoken about among half-forgotten, wished-to-be-forgotten things.
> They will tell the spider: "Go on, you're doing good work."

The selfsame universal spider will draw "a silver string nest" over the people and things the poet has loved. Only the good lovers are worth remembering: Jonah, Nero, Sinbad, Nebuchadnezzar, Jack Cade, John Brown, Jesse James. The nations at war were a pack of lions; they will go the way of the older nations. He says it all in the best of his longer poems: "Four Preludes On Playthings Of The Wind." Strangely enough, this chant owes a good deal to a comparatively obscure American poet: Wallace Stevens. As the work of Sandburg grew more esthetic, he came under the influence of this most esthetic American: a glorious dandy who has issued but one volume, with little more than a hundred buyers. We shall come to "Harmonium" later. The first prelude is Stevens simplified by Sandburg:

> The woman named To-morrow
> sits with a hairpin in her teeth
> and takes her time
> and does her hair the way she wants it
> and fastens at last the last braid and coil
> and puts the hairpin where it belongs
> and turns and drawls: Well, what of it?
> My grandmother, Yesterday, is gone.
> What of it? Let the dead be dead.

The second prelude describes doors of cedar and panels of gold bearing the inscription:

> We are the greatest city,
> and the greatest nation:
> nothing like us ever was.

"Sheets of rain swish through on the wind" where this America stood. The third prelude shows the fate of older nations who sang of their own greatness: "the only listeners left now are . . .

the rats . . . and the lizards." The fourth prelude concludes, beginning with a motif out of Stevens:

> And the wind shifts
> and the dust on a doorsill shifts
> and even the writing of the rat footprints
> tells us nothing, nothing at all
> about the greatest city, the greatest nation
> where the strong men listened
> and the women warbled: Nothing like us ever was.

This is a long distance from the jubilant Whitman who endured the intimate horrors of the Civil War and emerged, broken in health but strengthened in confidence. Sandburg responded to the tragic disillusionment of the World War. Whitman rose at the birth of the nation; Sandburg grew up in the midst of its vast development and vaster braggadocio, and saw that much of the vastness was hollow, many of the claims superficial. His view of the nation is fully as patriotic as Walt's. No land is in need of skepticism more than successful America.

"Slabs Of The Sunburnt West" is inferior to the first three volumes. But the misgivings which attacked the poet's admirers, doubts akin to those occasioned by the later books of Pound, Lindsay and Masters, were recently relieved by "Good Morning, America." There are good things among the "Slabs," but the rest of the book is sketchy, repetitious, rather weary. The long poem, "Windy City," does not compare with the early "Chicago." The slang section is overdrawn. But the poem on the unknown soldier, "And So To-day," is a parade of masterly invectives against the rulers and orators of the land:

> The honorable orators,
> Always the honorable orators,
> Buttoning the buttons on their prinz alberts,
> Pronouncing the syllables "sac-ri-fice,"
> Juggling those bitter salt-soaked syllables—
> Do they ever gag with hot ashes in their mouths?

A movie camera man responds:

> "Feed it to 'em,
> they lap it up,
> bull . . . bull . . . bull."

The title poem is another study of American dissolution. It is rather disappointing on the whole. "At The Gates Of Tombs" says more in one page, or more in two lines:

> Civilizations are set up and knocked down
> the same as pins in a bowling alley.

Time has familiarized the Sandburg adventures: one expects little that has not been heard before. In spying a book with the slogan, "Good Morning, America," one is delighted that things may still lie ahead for Walt's leading descendant. In the six years since "Slabs Of The Sunburnt West," he has been strenuously busy with the huge biography of Lincoln, with Rootabaga Stories for children, with Songbags and such, and now one catches gossip concerning a monumental novel on an American tragedy. Except for the periodical appearance of a sketchy poem, Sandburg the poet had vanished among the realms of poetic prose. But here, thanks to the Swede in his arteries, is a stout book of poems at last, with greetings to nearly everything under the American sun. I opened the volume with misgivings inspired by my younger and wiser neighbors. Most of them had sent it to the scrap-heap after skimming a dozen poems. I closed it quite contentedly—certain that though the prairie galoot had added little to the Sandburg of old, that little holds much for the imagination to thrive on.

What the book has gained over its predecessors is mostly a firmer handling of the materials of life. The technical equipment is equal to the varying demands of pure form in free verse. No sonneteer could do better with the kindred severities of classical versification. Lines, phrases, syllables, consonants, vowels, all things interweave harmoniously. The artist has grown mellow. The soil has been conquered. The style has caught trees and people in a form thoroughly original and thoroughly a part of the race. But one regrets somewhat this final perfection. It begins to sound dangerously repetitious in places. The man may still adventure, but the style will cling too tenaciously. It has become a convention. And yet, if one looks a little closer, goes a little deeper, one finds something to offset whatever one holds against the over-refinement of form. Sandburg has accepted

life in toto. He has done so with open eyes in the head of his wide-open temperament. This book has none of the jauntiness of the Chicago poems of twelve years ago. The man is elbow to elbow, arm in arm, with all things. He neither accepts nor denies. Things are and he is. He goes with them and they with him, and all intermingle and move at an almost impersonal gait. There is nothing which has not its death; nothing dead which has not its life. The mystic has a vision, and the vision is all-embracing. And the heart of the vision is tender in the richest, strongest connotation of that old, disreputable word.

Amid the apparent disillusionment America has forced on his faith, there is a sturdy acceptance of the truth about the mad land no man has ever loved more. On the surface, this book has a tragic air, a heartbreaking threnody. But Sandburg knows his people are merely as human as the Babylonians, the Jews, the Romans. And being human, now, heretofore and hereafter, he hobnobs with one and all. The song lies where it should lie: between tragedy and comedy. There is never the one nor the other, but both together, indivisible. Though oblivion steal the best gift of all—love and the heart that goes with it—everlasting night has not yet arrived. There is still a salute for the morrow, and the same ruddy change ready to grow to the same old sameness. There's no hurry about farewells. We part with nothing the older races have not parted with before. There's still no occasion for the inevitable epitaph. "Money isn't everything." There's still something to say good morning to. Even America. But one has to be a little more cautious, a little more cagey, than formerly. One is not quite so crazy as one was before the World War. A bit of wisdom has tempered the adolescent years.

> Are you happy? It's the only way to be, kid.
> Yes, be happy, it's a good nice way to be.
> But not happy-happy, kid, don't be too doubled-up doggone happy.
> It's the doubled-up doggone happy-happy people . . . bust hard
> . . . they do bust hard . . . when they bust.
> Be happy, kid, go to it, but not too doggone happy.

XXII

SINGING NEW THINGS IN OLD FORMS

And better is a temple made of bark and thong
Than a tall stone temple that may stand too long.
Orrick Johns.

LEAVING younger vers librists to a later analysis, and turning back to the conservative camps coexistent with the modern revolt, the surveyor of American poetry is confronted with increasing difficulties. Reaching back fifteen to twenty years, refreshing his memory with books and anthologies of the period, he will find a host of familiar names, many familiar no longer. Again, his summaries cannot be final. On the one hand, he will stand a little too close to the recent scene; on the other, reports will be incomplete until each poet has completed his life work. Catholicity of judgment will be hampered by personal bias; as a groping member of the other camp, he will recall his own people with greater affection and more active memories. Despite a love of fair play, he is liable to give them the benefit of doubts in perspective. This impulse may breed a contrary impulse: the desire to give due credit to the other poets may betray him into rendering more than is due. On the whole, he will be an uncertain guide to superlative criticism. He will have to offer hints in place of finalities, especially if finalities are distasteful to his temperament. He will give the reader as many hints as possible, and hope that they stimulate further adventuring. And the reader will enjoy the prefatory luxury of correcting the surveyor's errors and misapprehensions.

The year 1912 gave birth not alone to *Poetry* and *The Poetry Journal*, but also to *The Lyric Year*, the competitive anthology founded by Ferdinand Pinney Earle, and issued by the pioneer Kennerley. The following year brought the first of Braithwaite's huge annuals; to these one adds the almost as kindly

anthologies of Jessie B. Rittenhouse. Furthermore, the continued effort of The Poetry Society Of America and its tributaries must not be overlooked. The Society, in the heart of New York, devoted itself to traditional forms and stimulated poets with prizes and open forums. Outside the liberal columns of *The New Republic,* most New York ventures were hostile to experiment, unless it embraced classical tenets. Radical experiments were undertaken elsewhere, with Chicago in the lead. The conservative camps were productive of a number of poets who wrote original things inside restricted forms. Such poets proved that a man can be himself in a sonnet, a lyric, a ballad, fully as well as in Whitmanesque dithyrambs or unrhymed cadences. Devotees to classicism had a much wider field of publication, but the free verse fraternity were not denied a hearing. The popularity of Masters, Sandburg, Miss Lowell, attests to the reception paid to radicals by the always surprising American public.

Turning to the classic devotees, one is confounded by numbers, and discovers that names once prominent are prominent no longer—are indeed mostly forgotten. One refers the reader to anthologies and magazines of the period, with the assurance that he may find many things the jaded surveyor has overlooked. Just as one reverts to anthologists from Griswold to Stedman, one reverts to anthologists from Braithwaite and Miss Rittenhouse to Miss Monroe and Untermeyer. Even a list of traditional poets fairly prominent before the World War cannot be complete. Some one is certain to be left out, though the list extend to a hundred names. The compiler can only collect a partial list; this must then be reduced to the men and women who have done original things inside the old forms. Reference must also be made to the skillful manipulators of tradition. They probably added nothing new to American poetry, but they helped a youthful race perfect itself in versification. First of all, I offer a list of poets who have had no lasting influence on the deeper course of American poetry. Some have distinguished themselves in other fields; some have not lived up to an early promise; others have died or ceased writing. Among

the following names, there are doubtless some who have written a poem or two that will be remembered by future anthologists; such poems will help the poets survive the errors of present historians: Zoe Akins, Maxwell Anderson, Karle Wilson Baker, Elsa Barker, Joseph Warren Beach, Morris Abel Beer, Gamaliel Bradford, Amelia Josephine Burr, James Branch Cabell, Rhys Carpenter, Willa Cather, Lincoln Colcord, Isabel Fiske Conant, Olive Tilford Dargan, Fannie Stearns Davis, Lee Wilson Dodd, Louise Driscoll, Max Eastman, John Erskine, Florence Kiper Frank, Theodosia Garrison, William Griffith, Hermann Hagedorn, Amanda Benjamin Hall, Brian Hooker, Leslie Nelson Jennings, Howard Mumford Jones, Thomas S. Jones, Jr., Harry Kemp, Louis V. Ledoux, Agnes Lee, Elias Lieberman, Ludwig Lewisohn, Percy Mackaye, Scudder Middleton, Ruth Comfort Mitchell, Harriet Monroe, Angela Morgan, Grace Fallow Norton, Edward J. O'Brien, John Myers O'Hara, Shaemas O'Sheel, William Alexander Percy, Jessie B. Rittenhouse, Robert Haven Schauffler, Alan Seeger, Frances Shaw, Odell Shepard, Joel Elias Spingarn, Trumbull Stickney, Charles Wharton Stork, Paul Tanaquil, Charles Hanson Towne, George Sylvester Viereck, Blanche Shoemaker Wagstaff, Willard Wattles, Winifred Welles, Margaret Widdemer, Florence Wilkinson, Marguerite Wilkinson, Clement Wood, Cuthbert Wright—and of course others and others. It should not be difficult to undermine such a list with single quotations. I should like to begin such quotations by referring to Beach's "Rue Bonaparte," Miss Burr's "My Mother," Miss Cather's "Spanish Johnny," Miss Driscoll's "The Idol," Eastman's "The Aquarium," Hagedorn's "Doors," Miss Hall's "A Woman Of Words," Kemp's "Literary Love," Miss Lee's "The Sweeper," Mackaye's "Song from Mater," Miss Mitchell's "The Night Court," Miss Monroe's "The Water Ouzel" (in free verse), Miss Morgan's "Three Green Trees," Miss Norton's "Deer On The Mountain," O'Sheel's "They Went Forth To Battle," Percy's "Overtones," Seeger's "I Have A Rendezvous With Death," Miss Shaw's "Cologne Cathedral," Shepard's "The Elm," Wattles' "The Builder" and "Creeds," Stickney's "Mt. Lykaion," Miss Welles' "Language" and "Love Song

From New England," Miss Widdemer's "Greek Folk Song," Miss Wilkinson's "The End," Wood's "Eagle Sonnets." One may say of this group of poets that their souls were moved to some sort of rapture, but that most of the rapture lost itself in literary clichés inspired by too many readings of Keats, Shelley, Swinburne and other romantic poets. Too many of the poems sound alike; it is hard to differentiate their authorship.

As a second group, one offers the comedians of the period: the satirists, parodists and clowns who save the heavy head from too many doses of Beauty or Morality. Nonsense is an antidote against philosophy grown too solemn, and proffers a saucy wisdom of its own. As a rule, the clowns are a sad lot when they turn to serious singing: they grow dreadfully sentimental. Of the leading comedians, some of whom are still functioning, one returns to Franklin P. Adams, Leonard Bacon, Gelett Burgess, Dana Burnet, T. A. Daly, Arthur Guiterman, Don Marquis, Christopher Morley, Keith Preston, Edwin Meade Robinson, Bert Leston Taylor. Most of these men were or still are colyumists in the tradition of the early "Croakers," and of Field, Bunner and the Carylls. Their work is similarly reared on scholarship, a love of racial follies and a clever mastery of light versification. Adams, Guiterman, Marquis, Morley, Preston, Robinson and Taylor are the most brilliant of the eleven, but none quite as brilliant as the California professor, Leonard Bacon. Bacon's devastating pen spares nobody, not even his own PHDs. In a volume subtitled, "Male and female created He them," there are two superb collegiate narratives: "Sophie Trenton" and "The Dunbar Tragedy." "The Banquet Of The Poets" is an enormously funny satire on modern poetry, with particular gibes at the vers librists:

> So there were Russells, Lawrences and Abbots
> And eighteen Coolidges and seven Cabots,
> Discoursing sweet with them who below Par—
> Nassus (far—far below) intone their ditties,
> The imagist children of the Morning Star,
> Arensburgs, Kreymborgs, and Giovanittis,
> Sandburgs who sing of God and Omaha,

> Chicago, Alton and the Central cities,
> And Indiana's offspring unsuppressed,
> The Middle Classics of the Middle West.

When Miss Lowell's "Critical Fable" appeared anonymously, most folk attributed it to Dr. Bacon. As a matter of fact, Bacon had spread his banquet two years before the Fable emerged, and Miss Lowell, hearing it privately, duly took note of its satire. The Banquet is better verse than the Fable, and owes its success to an air of mock solemnity. Bacon has also written excellent poetry—vide the moving monologue, "An Afternoon In Artillery Walk," in which Mary Milton takes down her blind father's "damnable dictation" against her will: "I am too full of blood and life for this."

B. L. T. and F. P. A. carried on Field's tradition in Chicago, and F. P. A. brought it to New York, where he shared it with Don Marquis. These colyumists should also be credited with the poets they have encouraged and developed. Among B. L. T.'s satires, "Ataraxia" and "Canopus" poke grave fun at astronomy:

> It's well, at times, to change your universe:
> The new one, if not better, can't be worse.

"Bygones" and "Post-Impressionism" are aimed at the abstractions of modern painting; "Old Stuff" attacks the triangle play. B. L. T. gains his effects through an assumed intellectual boredom with life, mankind and art. He was one of the earliest members of the "hard-boiled" school of literature. Hard-boiled too, on the surface, is F. P. A. This popular writer mixes the absurdest slang with the classic metres of Horace, Propertius and Villon, and usually explodes an ode with an idiotic fillip. "The Rich Man," "These Two Boys," "Ballade Of Schopenhauer's Philosophy," "Thoughts On The Cosmos," "To The Polyandrous Lydia" and "Georgie Porgie" (a parody of Sara Teasdale) are characteristic. The robustious fooling of Don Marquis, a scholar and man of the streets, may be found in "Another Villon-ous Variation," "Chant Royal Of The Dejected Dipsomaniac," "A Hot-Weather Song," "King Cophetua And The Beggar Maid" and "Savage Portraits" (in sonnet

form). The dejected dipsomaniac is constantly interrupted in the process of killing his uncle by the dumb-waiter bell and all manner of social nuisances. Each stanza closes: "My way of life can end in nothing good." Suddenly we are relieved to hear that "Uncle is gone!"

Robinson, the Cleveland humorist, is best known for his "Piping And Panning." "A Disagreeable Feature" is a series of crisp variations on a lady's nose. Further punning is discovered in "Villanelle Of A Villaness." "Limmericised Classics" parodies Homer, Shakespeare, Omar and Edgar Lee Masters, and "The David Jazz" parodies Lindsay's "The Daniel Jazz." The best of Morley's nonsense may be found in "Thoughts On Being Invited To Dinner":

> Of old, all invitations ended
> With the well-known R. S. V. P.,
> But now the laws have been amended
> The hostess writes
> B. Y. O. B.

"The Light Guitar," "The Laughing Muse" and "The Mirthful Lyre" are the titles of some of Guiterman's volumes. He is the most facile and prolific of the humorists. He can turn his pen to any topic and treat it in any verse form. Among his many parodies of books, none is better than the one in which a tedious catalogue of Masters', via Whitman's, is reduced to polyphonic prose:

> Of laces at Macy's, of thimbles at Gimbel's, of urns at Stern's and churns at Hearn's, of axes at Saks's, gold eagles at Siegel's . . .

The late Keith Preston of Chicago, professor of Latin and a colyumist, had a more intellectual wit, and the things he attacked received "left-handed compliments." He had the art of fooling solemnly, and followed his own grave advice:

> He must not laugh at his own wheeze:
> A snuff box has no right to sneeze.

Some of the clowns I have met are true to tradition: they are melancholy fellows in person. In a sense, they are disappointed

romanticists. The king of the tribe writes in prose, but some of his tales are sheer poetry. I have heard that he is the bluest of men and tries to forget the life tragic by frequenting the bowl and by losing himself in long improvisations at the piano. This may not be the place to introduce Ring Lardner, but I cannot help it. He is the artist par excellence among our humorists: his dumb-bells sing as no other folk in our fiction. . . .

We now come to a group of poets whose work still belongs to the body of American poetry or whose work has at least some particular interest. The list of names is long. It will be necessary to subdivide most into groups by no means arbitrary, and to consider outstanding individuals separately. There are fourteen men, more or less chronologically arranged: Ridgely Torrence, William Ellery Leonard, John G. Neihardt, Witter Bynner, Arthur Davison Ficke, Badger Clark, Donald Evans, Louis Untermeyer, Joyce Kilmer, William Rose Benét, John Hall Wheelock, David Morton, Orrick Johns, Conrad Aiken. And there are thirteen women one has to arrange alphabetically: Mary Austin, Grace Hazard Conkling, Alice Corbin, Gladys Cromwell, Hazel Hall, Aline Kilmer, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Rose O'Neill, Constance Lindsay Skinner, Leonora Speyer, Sara Teasdale, Eunice Tietjens, Jean Starr Untermeyer. The more important names seem to be those of Leonard, Neihardt, Bynner, Evans, Untermeyer, Benét and Aiken, and of Miss Cromwell, Miss Millay, Miss Teasdale, Mrs. Kilmer, Mrs. Speyer, Mrs. Untermeyer. But the other poets have many ardent admirers; one cannot be certain of an infallibility of taste. Three poets, each of whom write free verse, are primarily interesting for their studies of the American Indian: Mrs. Austin, Miss Corbin, Miss Skinner. Miss Corbin is the most interesting of the three. She has also written some charming Southern ballads, "Echoes Of Childhood," and a fine volume of New Mexico portraits, "Red Earth." Nor can one forget her invaluable service as an associate editor of *Poetry*, a task to which she brought more radical tendencies than Miss Monroe. She was born in St. Louis, the youthful literary metropolis which also gave birth to Orrick

Johns, Sara Teasdale, Marianne Moore and T. S. Eliot. Mrs. Austin's book on the Amerindian is a piece of distinguished scholarship. Mrs. Tietjens, another redoubtable *Poetry* associate, has a delightful Oriental book to her credit, "Profiles From China." These studies of an old race are composed in broad, free cadences. Her other books, "Body And Raiment" and "Profiles From Home," revert to traditional forms. "The Steam Shovel" and "The Drug Clerk" are realistic studies, firmly conceived and executed. In the realm of purely American folk lore, one turns to Badger Clark and John G. Neihardt. Clark has the honor of being sung by the cowboys themselves. "The Glory Trail" is known to them as "High-Chin Bob," a veritable classic. Neihardt, though rather disappointing in the mass, has definite qualities. Most of these are obscured or sidetracked by too close an adherence to old-fashioned rhetoric, a rhetoric as exultant, but not as original as Henley's. The Nebraska poet (born in Illinois) spent a number of years among the Omaha Indians and among the trappers and settlers of the state. For the past fifteen years, he has been working on a series of pioneer and Indian epics, the first of which were called "The Song Of Hugh Glass" and "The Song Of Three Friends." These admirable narratives are, as Untermeyer has shown, "American in feeling if not in execution." There are too many references to classical Greece. The language, though austere and dramatic, is insufficiently natural. The same fault may be found in the earliest books, "A Bundle Of Myrrh" and "Man-Song." The first created a furore in 1908. The lyrics in these two volumes, and in "The Stranger At The Gate," have a continuous exultation. They are full of clamor and battle—the poet is captain of his own soul—there is nothing on earth he is not prepared to fight—Christ is with him everywhere.

> I do not pray for peace nor ease,
> Nor truce from sorrow:
> No suppliant on servile knees
> Begs here against to-morrow!

A little later, this "Prayer For Pain" employs harps and lyres, shields and soaring larks. "Envoi," "When I Am Dead," "Let

Me Live Out My Years," "Battle Cry," have the same male pride and exclamatory sweep set to high rhetoric.

> Let me be as a tune-swept fiddlestring
> That feels the Master Melody—and snaps!

"Easter, 1923" is the most appealing of Neihardt's ballad-lyrics. It rehearses with simple power the return of "goose and crane," of battling rivers, as "the Mighty Giver emerges from the tomb!"

> O who can be a stranger
> To what has come to pass?
> The Pity of the Manger
> Is mighty in the grass!
>
> Undaunted by Decembers,
> The sap is faithful yet.
> The giving Earth remembers
> And only men forget!

Next one turns back to poets, popular in their day, who have left things worthy of memory: Torrence, Kilmer, Johns and Evans. Ridgely Torrence, born in Ohio in 1875, is a curiously reticent figure. As early as 1900, he issued "The House Of A Hundred Lights," and then waited twenty-five years before bringing out "Hesperides." Twelve years ago, he published a volume of negro plays, realistic and poetic, plays which ushered in the negro movement in the theatre. And, for many years past, Torrence has been the poetry editor of *The New Republic,* a position he has conducted with anonymous liberality and distinction. Despite his restraints, he is probably the most reliable of poetry editors. More important as a poet, it is a pity Torrence has devoted so little time to creative writing. He has none of the faults of the average conservative; he is too well endowed with self-criticism. Possibly the critic ultimately defeated the poet. In any event, he has written several poems distinguished for a reality of utterance and refinement of form. Though poems about Christ are easy to write and are written much too often, "Eye-Witness" is an exception. A tramp is the speaker, and he speaks in syncopated couplets:

I seem to myself like water and sky,
A river and a rover and a passer-by. . . .

A shadow comes along. The tramp's heart is spliced like an apple.

I asked him in front of the station-house wall
If he had lodgings. Says, "None at all."

I pointed to my heart, and looked in his face—
"Here,—if you haven't got a better place."

Torrence's poems about the underdog are never propagandistic. In this he is superior to his old friend, Moody. And "The Bird And The Tree" is a better poem than any of Cawein's on the Ku Klux Klan and lynching. But "The Son" remains the most triumphant poem in Torrence's collection. It is only sixteen short lines long, lines compact of tragedy, simplicity and double meaning. In a Southern Ohio market town, the poet encounters "an old farm-wife, selling some barley." In twelve mumbling lines referring to crops, the price per bushel of barley, and vague references to the death of Charley, we finally learn:

"It feels like frost was near—
His hair was curly.
The spring was late that year,
But the harvest early."

For sheer artistry, this poem has no superior in our literature.

In 1912, when *The Lyric Year* was issued by Kennerley, the first prize went to a poem called "Second Avenue," and critics clamored that it should have gone to a poem called "Renascence." The controversy brought fame to a girl named Edna St. Vincent Millay, and crowded the St. Louis poet, Orrick Johns, into the background. For ten years past, one has heard less and less of this truly distinguished lyrist. This is partly due to the fact that the little he has written of late does not compare with his early "Country Rhymes." For awhile, Johns was captured by Whitman and the free verse movement. "Songs Of Deliverance" and "Olives" were the result. The Songs, despite such stunning lines as "I knew my father well and he was a fool," are too dependent on Walt, and the "Olives,"

though very amusing, were merely parodies. Johns' true metier was the English lyric transplanted to American soil, a metamorphosis due to Housman's "Shropshire Lad." Otherwise, the "Country Rhymes" are indigenous things with a fascinating reality and rhythm. I am confident that such poems as "Little Things," "The Tree Toad," "Wild Plum," "The Interpreter," "The Answer," "The Door," "Dilemma," "Mothers And Children," will survive long after louder and more sensational poems have been laid away. They are instinct with fire, tenderness, wisdom, humor and music, always music. In this respect, Johns rivals Miss Reese—"Wild Plum" might have been written by her. And this is the way grown-ups greet the newly born:

> And they peep in his eyes and laugh like a lord
> To see another human that is not yet bored . . .

Here is the closing tribute to the woman:

> And the sound of her voice is sweeter than her milk,
> And the feel of her face is like smooth white silk . . .
> And a man may be ninety with a very long beard
> And not be any better than his mother feared.

"The Interpreter" is a singing elegy of one who "got all together" and "went like snow." "Little Things" is a tribute to the superiority of intimate over universal things: "a light tan cow in a pale green mead," "the soft March wind and the low March mist," the fragrance of forests and of trim village lawns—

> Oh, better let the little things I loved when little
> Return when the heart finds the great things brittle . . .

In "The Answer," a girl swears eternal fealty through the first three stanzas, to which the fourth replies:

> So I took her where she spoke,
> Breasts of snow and burning mouth . . .
> Crying cranes and drifting smoke
> And the blackbirds wheeling south.

Whatever bitterness may come of love, love is "a better thing to own than all of the wide impossible stars." "For life is only

a small house . . . and love is an open door." Johns is still a young man. Two years ago, he fled to Italy. There, in solitude, he has begun writing again. He is busy with a series of long narratives which have not yet been published. Whether his work advances or not, there are always the little things. They are as spontaneous now as they were when they came out of the earth.

Joyce Kilmer, born the year before Johns, died over ten years ago, killed in action not long before the signing of the Armistice: killed in his thirty-second year. It now appears that the poet did not live long enough to develop an early promise—a promise, one adds ruefully, deriving from poets of the London Nineties, and translators of light French forms. Kilmer never outgrew a dilettantism embracing many movements in turn: pedagogy, journalism, editing, socialism and finally Catholicism. He was apparently most at home in the Church, and edited a Catholic anthology, "Dreams And Images." His most popular poem, "Trees," turns its back on the days of estheticism. The first five couplets have a charm of their own, but the oft-quoted final couplet begins to sound rather glib:

> Poems are made by fools like me,
> But only God can make a tree.

And that fine portrait, "Martin," begins to sound too much like one of Robinson's. Journalism and popularity contrived to retard Kilmer's development, and whatever he gained from Catholicism was cut down in France. I regret recalling that his death gave his poetry a bogus popularity similar to Alan Seeger's. I have to say this in the face of an early friendship. Kilmer's work was ultimately surpassed by Aline Kilmer's. In "Poets," he might have written his own epitaph:

> They shall not live who have not tasted death;
> They only sing who are struck dumb by God.

Another poet who began with the British Nineties and light French forms, and who died suddenly, was the Philadelphian, Donald Evans. Like George Sterling, he died of his own voli-

tion. In 1912, Evans issued "Discords." This was followed by "Sonnets From the Patagonian," "Two Deaths In The Bronx," "Nine Poems From A Valetudinarian" and "Ironica"—the last in 1919. Evans had a genius for exquisite masks of cynicism. Some masks were borrowed from London and Paris; the rest he fashioned himself. He wore them all in graceful defiance to society. In the early days of Greenwich Village, before it had degenerated into a profitable investment for real estate brokers, tea shops and fake bohemians, Evans was the prince of a light band of esthetes, satirists, dandies, poets, dilettanti. Out of this band came such exquisites as Witter Bynner, Walter Conrad Arensberg and the distinguished Wallace Stevens. Evans' first volume was a mélange of foreign influences: Wilde, Dowson, Swinburne and Browning, and of Robinson via Browning. But the book contained ingredients of the later Evans: the social satirist, the adorer of beauty, disillusion and dissolution, of cold-blooded horror, of nonchalant sin and deviltry—and of sensitive tenderness. The last is the inner motivator of all the masks. "Discords" also unveils the poet's devotion to a form he made his own: the cynical sonnet. "Silver Wedding," "Divorce," "Cette Maladie Qui S'Appelle La Vie," "Placide Pours Tea" and "Churches" are characteristic. Behind its masquerade, "Sonnets From The Patagonian" is an intensely personal book. The poems are dedicated to such friends as Carl Van Vechten, Pitts Sanborn, Fania Marinoff, Louis Sherwin, Gertrude Stein, and to Donald Evans and Cornwall Hollis—the latter an Evans pseudonym. Even some of the objective portraits are apparent self-portraits, notably the two on Igor Vyvyan.

> He strokes himself with vices tenderly;
> He cradles sin, and with a figleaf fan
> Taps his green cat, watching a bored sun span
> The wasted minutes to eternity.

"En Monocle," "Born with a monocle he stared at life," after describing the "calm moustache," the "fawn-coloured laugh," "blue pumps that are ardent for the air," closes with "lusts uncomforted to kiss the naked phrase quite unaware." This sonnet

was surpassed by Stevens' gorgeous group, "Le Monocle De Mon Oncle," but Stevens' indebtedness is unmistakable. The portraits of women are aristocratic and sadistic. "And he drained her stiffened limbs with cruel art." "There were the thousand parts she had essayed, and the three thousand gowns that she had worn." In the portraits of Mabel Dodge (about whom Gertrude Stein has also written a portrait), there are such lines as, "Her hidden smile was full of hidden breasts"; "And she was sad since she could not be sad"; "She tried to rouge her heart, yet quite in vain." The three portraits of Louise Norton (now Mme. Edgar Varése) are dedicated to Evans.

> Her voice was fleet-limbed and immaculate,
> And like peach blossoms blown across the wind
> Her white words made the hour seem cool and kind,
> Hung with soft dawns that danced a shadow fete.

The portrait of Van Vechten is inscribed to Gertrude Stein. The first line is the key to the character: "He polished snubs till they were regnant art." Better still are the autobiographic sonnets. They are fearless, incisive, masochistic. "Wistfully shimmering, shamelessly wise and weak, he lives in pawn, pledging a battered name." At the bottom of a glass in a Broadway dance hall, "He heard the echo of a genius pass." "And chastely he spends an hour every day erecting tombstones to carnalities." "For he knows sewers run beneath the city streets." "He died a hero in Fifth Avenue one yellowed day saving a tattered man."

"Two Deaths In The Bronx" contains Evans' adventure into free verse. He is one of the few poets equally at home in old forms and new. In the "Portrait Of Nancy Trevors," three gentlemen pay court to a lady, "and her husband was the third." "Dinner At The Hotel De La Tigresse Verte" discloses two silk-swathed lovers imprisoning "fickleness in the vodka," the while "dark windows whispered down to them." To her vaporous question, "In which room shall it be to-night, darling?" the lover promptly replies: "In every room, my beloved!" "For The Haunting Of Mauna, Body Of The Queen," is a superbly

sensuous poem in blank verse. The body of the woman and her lover form a compact against death. They have each other no matter what transpires—"though the hour will come when she will tire of us." "Mary Douglass Bruiting The Beauty Of The Hands Of Monsieur Y" is a subtle study of the hands of a portrait painter whose haunting desires turn to canvases and leave the woman inviolable. "The Valetudinarian" volume is disappointing. There are several portraits in the manner of Robinson, a few slight poems about the war, and a lyric: "As A Decadent Passes." Death brings "over one lone hill new-cut gardenias for my head and feet." "Ironica" is a better volume, but it does not fulfill the promise of the sonnet book and the Bronx book. "Ironica" is a graver volume, but the gravity does not wear as well as the older flippancy. The real tragedian is better revealed in the lighter vein. Possibly the war destroyed the old aristocrat:

> Kingship is passing down the yellow road,
> And crowns are dangling from the willow tree;
> Royalty flees to seek a last abode
> With the other outcasts of eternity. . . .
>
> The mob is jigging to a ribald air
> That mocks the dying pulse of sovereignty;
> Humanity is singing everywhere
> All men are equal. Dupes of democracy!

Evans had had his day, or rather his night, and, finally cornered by tragedy, raised his esthetic hand against himself. He died eight years ago, in his thirty-seventh year. As Witter Bynner has written:

> It is not hushed, like other deaths, nor grim,
> Nor tragic nor heroic news,
> But more as if we had not noticed him
> Go by on lightly squeaking shoes
>
> And down the coffins of the race
> Tiptoe and stumble till he found his own,
> Then clear his throat and decorate his face
> With the consummate silence of a stone.

The period contains three other sonneteers: Ficke, Morton and Leonard. Ficke, an esthete and aristocrat, is somewhat related to Evans. But the Davenport poet owes more to Rossetti and the pre-Raphaelites, and to Meredith's "Modern Love." He has issued about ten volumes, and a carefully revised edition of "Selected Poems." It is significant that the volume opens with a sonnet sequence: "Nocturne In A Library":

> O long-time friends! What other power than you
> Can nourish our old passion?—hold us true
> To the young faith which once our hearts aroused?

Ficke is a bookish poet of the first order. One admires his scholarly sensibilities, his accomplished touch, the perfection of his poetic textures. He concludes a preface on the nature of poetry: "And if the art of poetry needed defending, one might point out that no part of the so-called wisdom of the race is safe from refutation and disproof and ultimate rejection except a few snatches of song, a few vibrant dramatic words, a few exalted lyric cries of delight or despair or amazement." It is just these lovely qualities, and no more, the body of the book discloses. The old calendar of beauty leafs over the day-dream, "the Virgin in the harlot's face," the Golden Age, modern romance classically fashioned, loneliness, love, desire, satiety. Here too, especially among the charming lyrics, we find April, Pierrot and Columbine, fading memories, lovely ladies, naked girls, elegies, bohemianism and bitterness. If one is careless in reading along, one will be lulled by the musician; and overlook the human note behind the music: such things as the tragic "Portrait Of An Old Woman." And reading too many sonnets in a melancholy vein, one may miss such sonnets as "Demand," "Possession," "Leaf-Movement." Of the girl who has loved others and will love again, he makes the surprising request:

> Dear, give me something, now before we part,
> Not to be given again. . . . Give me your heart.

In the desire to possess the beloved, the lover declares:

> And I would do such violence to you, dear,
> As only Death, corrupting Death, can do:

> Bury your body, to have you always near,
> And stop your heart, to keep it ever true,
> And hide you in such darkness of embrace
> That none, not even I, could see your face.

This is more than a literary emotion, but such moments are rather exceptional. The sonnets on children and childhood are romantic; the sonnets on the war full of disillusionment, though Ficke crossed the seas as a Major.

> If we return, be it with savage mirth
> To loathe the thing we fought for, and called home!

From this poignant note, we turn to a sonnet sequence, "Beauty In Exile," and to the books of yore. Then comes the famous narrative, "Sonnets Of A Portrait-Painter," first issued in 1914. This remains Ficke's finest contribution to American poetry. Though it lacks the sustained fire and dramatic interest of Rossetti's "House Of Life," Mrs. Browning's "Sonnets From The Portuguese," Meredith's "Modern Love" and Leonard's "Two Lives," it has original qualities. It lacks impassioned continuity; one is a little too aware of the separate sonnets, and of the sonnet form—an admirable instrument for the unfolding of a tragic tale. This is the tale of an artist's love for a woman, of her timeless beauty, of her superiority to "Cassandra, Helen and Persephone." Love develops to passion and passion returned; and falls from grace when the woman reverts to conventional ways. Then it rises to hatred and scorn, and then droops away to grief, despair and elegies when word is brought that the woman is dead. In these forty-seven sonnets, Ficke set himself an extremely difficult task. If he failed in the main, he did not fail in the item. A number of the single sonnets are intensely lyrical; the varying moods rise and fall dynamically. The love affair begins on a grotesque note. Here we do not greet Launcelot and Guinevere, Tristan and Iseult—

> I only know our first impassioned kiss
> Was in your cellar, rummaging for beer.

The tenth sonnet is the one most frequently quoted: "I am in love with high far-seeing places." I prefer the Nature and love

sonnet, "I have seen beauty where light stabs the hills." Storm, cloud and sunlight are transformed to the woman who sweeps the lover to her heart. The entrance of a rival lover is sharply revealed. Haunted by this shadow, awaiting the woman in "his own Sybaritic room,"

> I sit alone beneath my desk-lamp's glare,
> Cursing the fate that made you mine, and fair.

Hatred, jealousy, passionate ironies, are melted by the woman's tears: "I knew not you could weep!" Summer returns as she confesses:

> "My love is yours:—be tender, fierce, or strange,—
> You still are you, unchanged through every change."

The new serenity does not endure. In revived tumult, the man longs "that my kiss should strike you dead at my feet." The thirty-fourth sonnet quietly declares:

> So you go back,—because they bid you come
> And stand with them to prove the tales untrue,—
> Until at last the whispers shall grow dumb,
> And men forget the thing they guessed or knew. . . .
> Well then, go back! To your dead gods be true.
> What can you say to me, or I to you?

The artist parts company with things loved of old. As the world crumbles beneath his feet, he dedicates the spring to other lovers. It needs but the tidings of death to complete his tragedy. The last two sonnets turn to elegies—

> Love, love, I keep memorial of you! Nay!—
> Unsolved, bright, lonely, till my Judgment Day!

There is another sequence on beauty, "Rue Des Vents," and sequences on growing older: "On Tides Of Time" and "The Middle Years."

> Not all my will can change this casque of bone
> That predetermines what each thought must be;
> And I have learned to bear with these my own
> Enforced defeats and doomed futility . . .

Like his lifelong friend, Witter Bynner, Ficke has been devoted to the Orient: there are poems on Asiatic themes. There is even a "Guide To China" in sonnet sequence. Ficke is a man who has lived and loved and lived again, consecrating his experience to beautiful things and expressions. He is a finer poet than he permits himself to be.

In David Morton, the Kentucky lyrist, we arrive at the purely conventional sonnet: conventional in mood and speech. He has issued three books: "Ships In Harbour," "Harvest," "Nocturnes And Autumnals." The dream is pregnant here, reality unreal. Even the popular sonnet, "Old Ships," finds "the dream upon them, evermore," as the most potent aspect. These are not the ships of Melville or Eugene O'Neill. A storm, though beautiful, is not as beautiful as a woman. Like most Southern poets, all the way back to Poe, Morton is smitten with nostalgia, impalpable desires and images, with the moon overhead. When he writes about music, we hear only echoes, and when he walks with Beauty, the beauty is correctly wedded to sonnetry. Consider some of the titles of the recent volume: "Nostalgia," "Before Rain," "The Fog's Way," "Winter Moon," "Eerie Night," "Spring Sky," "Summer Midnight," "New Sorrow," "Via Mystica." Here there is much concern with the subject of artistry: the carver of wood, the jeweler, Virgil and Catullus. And much concern with rains, half rains, mists, dusts, further dreams. The form is always impeccable. The meaning is ever clear; the metre never stumbles; the rules are faithfully observed. One feels an affection for the hermit behind the lines: the man writing his warm, cool diaries. One has heard that Morton is not alone an English instructor at Amherst—in succession to Frost—but a football coach. One wishes he would turn his octaves and sestets into rival teams and let them struggle and flounder in the autumn mire and mud. But the sonnets are far removed from athletics; they house themselves in the dim study and go through their academic capers. Even the love sonnets are restrained. Reading a few at one sitting, how lovely they are—especially "Lover To Lover":

Leave me a while, for you have been too long
A nearness that is perilous and sweet:
Loose me a little from the tightening thong
That binds my spirit, eyes and hands and feet.
For there are old communions I would hold,
To mind my heart what field and sky may be:
Earth bears her fruit . . . November has a gold . . .
And stars are still high points in constancy.
Loose me a little, now. . . . I have a need
Of standing in an open, windy place,
Of saying names again, of giving heed
To these companions of man's lonely race . . .
Loose me to these, between one dusk and dawn;—
I shall have need of them, when you are gone.

From the sonnets of Evans, Ficke and Morton, we turn to those of William Ellery Leonard, or rather to the drama in sonnet form: "Two Lives." Despite its defects, it is one of the glories in our narrative poetry. Leonard's other books—he is one of our veterans—are comparatively insignificant: "The Vaunt Of Man," "The Lynching Bee," "Tutankhamen" and "Son Of Earth" (the collected poems). The collection is autobiographically arranged, and contains such fine poems as "The Lynching Bee" and the "Unpublished Leaves" from "Two Lives." On the whole, one feels the poet was wise in publishing the Leaves separately. They were included in the original version and then removed. "Two Lives" was written as long ago as 1913. Because some of the people in the poem were still living, publication had to wait for nearly ten years; then the book came out privately. It was given to the public in 1925 and created a sensation, running through many editions. "Two Lives" is based on a great theme and composed in the grand manner of classical Greece—with a modern difference: the story is told in the first person. This person is so intimately concerned in every phase of the tragedy, that he is the only one to unfold it: a task he achieves for the most part with austere objectivity. We know from the outset that the story is his own: hints we receive of the impending tragedy are deepened by our knowledge that the man is telling it in memory, after his wife's death.

Past, present and future hover over every line. We live in all three tenses at once—a Grecian device. And the interpolated Grecian parallels, far from being merely bookish, support the modern play with a spacious, timeless base, and even share in the plot. The narrator is a scholar and teacher; he has been called from Cambridge to Wisconsin as an instructor in English; he rents a room in the attic of an old house; he hears a girl singing an old French ballad; ultimately he meets her: she is the shy housekeeper, tending her invalid father and flitting about their home. As unconscious intimacies grow, the girl becomes the delighted pupil of the guest. They share their love of German *lieder,* especially those of Schubert; they read together, with Homer at the head. The scholar, who is more than a scholar, shows her some of his own poetry. No outline of this marvelous tale can give the slightest impression of its deep humanity, of the many piercing details, down to the smallest, that drive home the drama. The most insignificant fact the author brings from beyond the grave becomes tremendously poignant.

On the technical side, though we begin reading sonnets, sonnets for the most part almost too strict in form, we soon lose all consciousness of sonnetry. We listen only to the story, dramatically beating its powerful pulse, dramatically swaying our own. There are occasional awkward lines. In his determination to maintain a steady beat, the author permits a twisted syntax to set aside a natural syntax where the natural would have served his purpose without disturbing the metrical scheme. Now and then, in order to avoid an extra short syllable, he drops the definite or indefinite article: "in further corner," "in hall," "was it scholar's enterprise." These minor defects grow important if we have to read a passage twice in search of the prose meaning. And they interrupt the rhythm of the poem. In other places, there are unnecessary inversions, old-fashioned poetic locutions. A line like, "What 'tis to count in divers needs of men," would sound better as, "What it is, etc." Such defects are fortunately rare. The real defects of the story lie deeper than technical problems. After one closes the book, one regrets that the author, though detached in his story-telling,

was not in the last analysis, completely detached. He attempts to achieve serenity, a Grecian katharsis; but the last part, with its denunciation of friends who played him false, does not entirely escape mere denunciation. The terrific bitterness has not yet been mellowed by greater factors. One venerates a man who persists in facing, rather than fleeing his enemies; who spends year after year in their midst, still teaching English in a hive which has betrayed him. There is something of the old world, something un-American in such stoicism. One realizes that the story has been told in refutation of the calumnies occasioned by his wife's suicide. The poet is condemned and hounded for this terrible act, though it must have been clear to those who knew her that she poisoned herself to escape an inherited insanity. Quite a few people, aware of the condition of her mind, had warned the scholar against marrying her. The girl herself had warned him; he had learned from her that she had tried three times to drown herself, only to be saved by her father. Parts One and Two are a beautifully tender exposition of their growing love, of their marriage, of their joy and happy pursuits—with fatalistic things knocking at the door of the old house. These secretly work for their destruction, but cannot destroy mutual happiness and trust. Nowhere in American literature is there anything more substantially beautiful than this love of theirs. It is so real, so human, so nearly divine. And the devotion of the man, his effort to conquer in every conceivable way the inevitable march of destiny, is truly heroic, and of no avail. The suicide scene is utterly shattering. Her last words to nurse and doctor are: "Where is he?—be good to my poor husband."

Part Three is a nightmare of prostration, of sorrows, of courage—and of the devastating inconstancy of friends and colleagues. The poet goes into retirement among "the sheltering grace of trees," and lives among the memories of the one short spring he had shared with his wife. She is an ever vital Phantom. Calumnies penetrate his retreat; the poet turns on his enemies. The denunciations are magnificent; nothing could be more drastic. He gradually recovers a semblance of self among

the members of his family, among old tragic books, among classic parallels: in Faust, Euripides, Dante, Shakespeare, Æschylus. He also opens the Bible; ultimately he is "ready for God."

> I made the test in God's own Laboratory
> (If sages speak the truth), with each appliance
> Perfect in its adjustment; and my Science
> Showed no results: there shone no inward glory,
> There flooded me no dominant control,
> No truth, no peace that passeth understanding;
> Until at last, as ship that makes its landing,
> I anchored on its native shore my soul,
> Knowing this, this: for *me* no Comforter
> From Otherwhere, for *me* salvation none,
> Save such as by stern action might be won
> Among things round me; I said: "It horror were
> In *such* a world, were Foresight at the wheel"—
> I said: " 'Ich lass den Herrgott aus dem Spiel.' "

So the poet turns to the call of humanity, heard afar, "and trained the shattered body back to speed." No church can house him, and "prophets of a World-communion" fail him as well.

> Ye grieve at such conclusion, saying: "So,
> In vain he suffered all the long distress,
> For vain his wisdom from his overthrow."—
> Spare me (who've been with life) such platitude—
> Even I have spelt new meanings for my good . . .

He is still, or was still, too near "the tempests of collapse" to articulate these meanings. The narrative, after a reference to a translation of Lucretius undertaken while the wife took down his dictation, stops at the line, "O Mors æterna—O eternal Death—" "the last, last letters she fingered key by key! The short epilogue, Indian Summer, plays about the refrain,

> (O *Earth-and-Autumn of the Setting Sun,*
> *She is not by, to know my task is done!*)

But is the task quite done? The girl-wife died about twenty years ago. About three years later, Leonard began and finished the poem. He has revised it several times since. Possibly, the time has not arrived for a more definite conclusion—and by

more definite, I do not mean more cheerful or optimistic. Nothing could be worse than a Longfellownian moral. But somewhere I miss a certain classic thoroughness the poet set out to attain. Nor is it impossible of attainment. Given this final thoroughness, "Two Lives" would be a great poem. As it is, it falls below the major works of the past to which it deserves to be related. Like so many American books of major promise, it is incomplete, immature, imperfect. The artist who wrote the book is not yet the equal of the man who suffered and endured the tragedy. . . .

In conclusion, one turns to Bynner, Untermeyer, Benét, Wheelock and Aiken. Each of these poets is a lyrist by nature and a musician in verse, and each has independent qualities. Bynner has not quite reached fifty; Aiken has just turned forty; but in spirit, these two are respectively the youngest and oldest poets of the five. Untermeyer, Benét and Wheelock are rhapsodists: Untermeyer a human rhapsodist, Benét a fantastic, Wheelock a mystic. Untermeyer tempers his rhapsodies with intermittent buffooneries. He is also a generous critic. Aiken tones down Untermeyer's enthusiasms with psychological criticism of a precise, almost niggardly character. On the whole, he is much the better critic of the pair. Benét is also an excellent critic. Wheelock is the silent man of the five, in some respects a hermit, though he lives in New York. He was born at Far Rockaway, Benét at Fort Hamilton, Bynner in Brooklyn, Untermeyer on Manhattan, Aiken in Savannah. Aiken was brought up in New Bedford, Cambridge and London. Bynner, Wheelock and Aiken are Harvard graduates; Benét graduated from Yale. Untermeyer attended the De Witt Clinton High School, but failed in Algebra and Geometry. In this he resembles an anonymous New Yorker who attended the Morris High School and failed in Physiology, History and English.

The salient characteristic of Bynner's verse is its perennial youthfulness. From his first volume, "Young Harvard," 1907, to his latest, "Caravan," 1925, there is unfailing love of life

and love wedded to the lightest, most graceful syllables. He has published many books and writes with the greatest fluency in a large variety of forms. He has unconsciously parodied so many other poets that it is difficult to corner the real Bynner; nor has he assimilated those poets in a style completely his own. I have a notion that when Bynner and Ficke, along with Marjorie Allen Seiffert, conceived their hoax on free verse and brought out the laughable volume called "Spectra," Bynner, playing the rôle of Emanuel Morgan, wrote his most original things. An indomitable playboy throughout his career, the pseudonym gave him the fullest personal opportunity. He recently buried Morgan under some posthumous poems, and the burlesque is over. He is once more the ardent lyrist doing many things well, but no thing superlatively. Though one admires the ease of the continued performance, one also deplores it. The poet is generous, but not generous enough. He is spontaneous, but so spontaneous that too many superficial moods get into print. And he is restrained at times when restraint stops up the deeper passions. He has courageous feelings on many public questions; he was expelled from the University of California for espousing conscientious objectors; he was an open pacifist, a defender of Sacco and Vanzetti; his democracy is genuine, his heart open to underlings. One cannot quarrel with a man who sacrifices comforts to ideals and opinions. And he is always on the side of youth against the older generation, his own generation included. He has been a perpetual inspiration to young men at colleges; has read and encouraged countless reams of their poetry, and given prizes where prizes were deserved. The earth would be a much older earth without him. If one is disappointed in his poetry, it is because he has not written more. In a solemn world, we are grateful for graceful verse—even *vers-de-société*. But Bynner has written too little that is large and overwhelming. He can write poignantly, but we are not shattered. We are moved by what we read, but not permanently. In one place, the poet calls himself "the singing huntsman." A bow and lyre are the weapons he fights with,

primitive instruments smoothened under the hands of civilized races. Bynner's poetry, like that of Ficke and other members of their group, is indeed too civilized: too far removed from the yawp of the ancestral Whitman, too close to the courts of Britain and France. We wish America to grow up at the knees of her own primitives, not in the dying arms of Europe. It is needless to quote Witter Bynner. He has written many things and most are readily quotable. A selection of poems from his numerous volumes would compare favorably with the work of most other Americans. He belongs to a fine average of esthetes among whom no man is disgraced in belonging. But they have not deepened or altered the course of our poetry. Where some of our clumsy pioneers have failed and vanished, Bynner has succeeded. He has won his way along well-trodden paths, radical though he is by nature. He feels new things with every dawn, but he sings them as they have been sung before, especially by himself. He is still young; he will always be young, and always break rules. It is never too late to break the rules of versification.

Louis Untermeyer is somewhat related to Bynner. Equally romantic, moved by the social outcast and facile in the conquest of many old forms, Untermeyer is an unconscious parodist, and also a conscious parodist. His four books of parodies are supreme in their field. They echo the styles of their victims perfectly, and are first rate criticism. A poet thus parodied is a fortunate mortal. Untermeyer is a paradoxical being. Thoroughly successful in business, he spent twenty years of his energetic life in the jewelry establishment of his father, and rose to the vice-presidency before he resigned in 1923, to devote his whole time to literature. His love of the underdog was never a pose. He instituted reforms in the Newark factory, and established a profit-sharing régime among the employees. Meanwhile, he had issued a volume of verse, "First Love," in 1911. His subsequent industry as a man of letters was astounding, quite apart from his industry in the commercial world. In a sense, he was equally successful in the literary world. He succeeded as a poet, a critic, an editor, an anthologist, a lecturer: to these triumphs

he brought the same acumen which had crowned his practical activities. As a critic and editor, he has always been fairly sound: an opportunist taking no undue chances. He has a genius for gradually toning down an antagonistic view in time to step aboard a bandwagon and hail a poet the public has finally accepted. In this he resembles H. L. Mencken. On top of this, like Mencken, he is able to praise an author as though he had never been praised before—to discover the fellow, in short, and to receive credit for the discovery. The success of Mencken and Untermeyer merits the profoundest admiration, not to say, envy. They are the Russell Sages of criticism—to parody an Untermeyer pun. There is a still deeper paradox in Untermeyer's career. Despite his success as a poet, he happens to be one. It has taken a number of years for the poet to emerge. He is still by no means an original, but he is more original than formerly. Just as he outgrew his factory, he has outgrown his success in literature. Such a quixotic development could only take place on our shores.

"Challenge," 1914, was the first volume to attract attention. Of "First Love," the poet himself has written: "the influences of Heine and Housman were not only obvious but crippling." "The ghost of Henley haunts" the pages of "Challenge," and there are too many "urges" and "surges." But the autobiographer pins his faith to "Landscapes" and "Caliban In The Coal Mines." "Landscapes" contains vigorous descriptions of Nature, especially in the second stanza. The poem concludes with a contrasting view of New York tenements—ruined by the final line: "*Good God, and what is all this beauty for?*" The "Caliban" poem is very popular. The miners, grubbing away in the dark and calling on God to fling them "a handful of stars," are rather sing-songy and glib. "Challenge" was followed by "These Times," "The New Adam," "Roast Leviathan." "The New Adam," composed of modern love songs, is full of exuberance. The tone is masculine, jocund, invincible, and the tributes to woman adoring. "Hands" is a stimulating poem, romantic and realistic. The last two stanzas have a large shapeliness and movement:

What mastery directs them through the world
  And gives these delicate bones so great a power?
You drop your head. You sleep. Your hands are curled
  Loosely, like some half-opened, perfumed flower.

An hour ago they burned in mine and sent
  Armies with banners charging through my veins.
Now they are cool and white; they rest content,
  Curved in a smile. The mystery remains.

In "Roast Leviathan," Untermeyer begins to approach maturity. The old Hebraic and modern Jewish poems are fiery. They will have nothing to do with Zionism and a return to Jerusalem. The cry is always, Forward into an alien world.

Let us turn
Like a new army risen from old dreams,
To sterner measures, universal schemes
Wherever something struggles, climbs or delves.
So let us shine above the past we know
And be a light not only to ourselves.

The other poems of the group are: "Monolog From A Mattress" (the death-scene of Heine), "Holy City," a lyric in which a woman's body is a man's true temple (a poem the poet has parodied), "Roast Leviathan," a Lindsayesque dithyramb, "Ghetto Prostitute"—"Make her go down in ragtime of disaster"—"Daughters Of Jephthah," a dance poem, "Istehar," "Solomon In Flatbush," "Folk-Songs," "Rebels" and "Ishmael." On the ironic side, "Ishmael" borrows a leaf from Heine—though Heine was no lover of his race. The irony here is sardonic. Jewish soldiers have been conscripted by European nations:

He goes, too dumbly to be grim,
  Down to the dead, the chosen ones;
While nations that rejected him
  Accept his flesh to stop the guns.

None the less, there is promise ahead: he may die the death of a captain. Like the poems of Emma Lazarus, Untermeyer's are somewhat self-conscious. The Jews are a magnificent people and need no defenders. Untermeyer's anti-war poems are

rather obvious and rhetorical. The rest of the book contains some further love poems—the best of which is "Five Trees"—some attacks on machinery, some lovely songs to his son, the late Dick Untermeyer, poems on the tragic relations of two freed and bound by wedlock, "Design For A Perfect World"—in which the poet refuses to live—some friendly poems in the manner of Frost, Robinson, Sandburg, H. D. and Amy Lowell, and a number of excellent etchings in sonnet form. Untermeyer is usually a perfect craftsman. His sonnets are by turn, exultant, rhetoric, human, ironic and O. Henryesque. Too often, he claps on a ringing last line in the fashion of a Henry fillip. But he is avoiding this old pitfall more and more. "Country School-Room," "The Pilgrimage," "The Garland For Debs," "Auction" (in which some Keats' love letters are sold to the highest bidder), "Portrait Of A Reactionary," and "Portrait Of A Machine," are well conceived and carried out. Concerning the machine, he concludes in up-to-date fashion:

> It bears a deeper malice; lives to earn
> Its master's bread and laughs to see this great
> Lord of the earth, who rules but cannot learn,
> Become the slave of what his slaves create.

I am confident that this is a true picture of present-day thinking, and even more confident that such philosophy will not survive another generation. Man has always destroyed or improved on his own inventions in the course of inventing the future. Untermeyer is at his best in love poetry, and in ironies and parodies. "Five Trees," though it owes something to a lyric of Aiken's, is the finest poem in "Roast Leviathan." It is along the love line that Untermeyer has continued to develop. It is here he touches tragedy, and here he puts off masks, echoes and parodies and writes straight out from the turmoil of human relations. He has given such poems a richer technique: the skillful use of assonance and alliteration in place of once popular rhymes:

> And yet does even the weariest heart want peace?
> Back to the fever, the intemperate pace,
> Back to the ruthless word, the headlong deed

(Fearing that passion stilled is passion dead),
The worn heart hungers. Forever unappeased,
Forever self-persuaded, self-opposed,
It turns away from each escape to pine
For the old wars and victories of pain;
Running to all that reason hopes to leave,
With no less hurt and even greater love.
As though to cry, "Here I belong—I must!
Here is the place where I have suffered most."

William Rose Benét is another exuberant poet. Most of his energies, until recently, have been captured by the most capricious fantasy. Behind his geniality beats a rollicking love for things unearthly: his Pegasus gallops on air and less than air. He has issued six volumes: "Merchants From Cathay," "The Falconer Of God," "The Great White Wall," "Perpetual Light," "Moons Of Grandeur," "Man Possessed." The titles are significant. Here is a mystic and balladist not unrelated to Lindsay and Chesterton. And like these men, he lets humor and buffoonery lighten his religiosity. In the sestet of "Tricksters," Benét confesses:

So when my smiling grieves the passerby,
I strut in all vocations not my own,
Wearing the centuries like a baldric slung;
Whilst shabby I gawk at this splendid I.
Chronos and Momus through my lips intone,
Archangels, heroes,—rascals yet unhung!

Benét is not as original as Lindsay, but he is an infinitely finer craftsman. He has an astonishing control of difficult metres; his rhymes are richly orchestrated. The ballad is his forte, and his devotion to an Orient far removed from New York is akin to James Elroy Flecker's—witness "Merchants From Cathay." Nor is Pegasus the only animal the poet rides through dim space. Falcons, unicorns, fawns, mustangs, apes, leviathans, set him astride another gorgeous adventure. "The Falconer Of God"—"I flung my soul to the air like a falcon flying—" has the fury and pace, but not the poetry, of Thompson's "Hound Of Heaven." "The Horse Thief" may have for its scene a Rocky Mountain canyon, but this is its sole concern with a

native background. There is a cowboy in the poem, but the horse he catches is Pegasus. Nor is Benét's insanity quite as insane as it appears. It is often a rhetoric, an unnatural madness, never reaching the visions of William Blake. Benét tells us:

> And I stand and I hold my breath, daylong, yearlong,
> Out of comfort and easy dreaming evermore starting awake,—
> Yearning beyond all sanity for some echo of that Song
> Of Songs that was sung to the soul of the madman, Blake!

"A Burglar Of The Zodiac" shows a further love of the Villon brood. "Whale," a recent composition, is the best of the ballads. It chants the growth of the whale from minnow to leviathan—and "the Lord . . . planned it all."

> "The Lord shall say with His Tongue,
> 'Now let all Heaven give hail
> To my Jest when I was young,
> To my very Whale.' "

Though Benét has developed as an artist and Lindsay has declined, the latter's odes and ballads remain superior. But the author of "Moons Of Grandeur" has been coming down from the skies and mingling with things and creatures of the earth. From out of nowhere, he suddenly turned to the writing of modern love songs and ballads, apparently inspired by his life with the late Elinor Wylie. "Primum Mobile" betrays the influence of her jeweled style, but here the resemblance ceases. "Eternal Masculine," "The Unjust Word," "Brazen Tongue" and especially "The Wood-Cutter's Wife" are superb poems and utterly original. The madness and vision are real and the songs, written in love, blood and bitterness, imaginative. The first three poems are variations on words hastily spoken.

> You will come, with eyes fierce; you will act a defiant surprise.
> Quick lightnings will pierce to our hearts from the pain in our eyes,
> Standing strained and averse, with the trembling of love that defies.

And then I will know, by the heartbreaking turn of your head,
My madness brought low in a hell that is spared to the dead.
The upas will grow from the poisonous words that I said . . .

"The Wood-Cutter's Wife" is a ballad with a slightly Irish vernacular. The poem is also a tour de force in veiled Imagism. In a beautifully cadenced series of images, we gradually follow the portrait, not of a peasant woman, but of the eternally variable feminine. She is a flirt, a jackdaw, an elf, a gentle thing, lightning, a dryad, a housewife, a mouse—and ever elusive. One realizes the poem is a portrait of Elinor Wylie—the "bronze hair" is hers.

But if I leave her seriously alone
She comes quite near, pre-empts some woodland stone,
Spreads out her kirtle like a shimmering dress
And fills my mind's remorseful emptiness
With marvellous jewels made of words and wit
Till all my being sings because of it.

Sings of the way her bronze hair waves about
And how her amber-lighted eyes peer out;
Sings of her sudden laughter floating wild,
Of all her antics of a fairy child,
Of her uplifted head and swift, demure
Silence and awe, than purity more pure.

So I must scratch my head and drop my axe,
While in her hands my will is twisted wax;
So, when she goes, deaf, dumb, and blind I sit
Watching her empty armchair opposite,
Witched by evasive brightness in the brain
That grows full glory, when she comes again.

And it is our tragedy, as well as Benét's, that she will never come again. . . .

1886 was the birth-year of a number of American mystics: Fletcher, Kilmer, O'Sheel, Morton, Benét and John Hall Wheelock. It also gave birth to the love poets, H. D. and Jean Starr Untermeyer, and to valiant Hazel Hall. Wheelock's mysticism is jubilant and grave, fervent and rhetorical. One is conscious of it no matter what the theme. He is never humor-

ous or light, like Lindsay and Benét; his work is indomitably serious and exalted. Too often, exaltation and exultation are the result of an applied philosophy. The impulse may be spontaneous, but the poem it gives way to, despite a singing, mounting rhythm, is usually a blending of song, Christian philosophy and enforced explanation. The interpretation is rarely left to the reader. From the subconscious, the poet rises to the conscious, descends to the self-conscious, and weds the self-conscious to the cosmic. Wheelock is a belated Transcendentalist. He has issued a number of volumes: "The Human Fantasy," "The Beloved Adventure," "Love And Liberation," "Dust And Light," "The Black Panther." The first and last are the best. Like Benét, Wheelock employs animals to embody religious symbols: "The Black Panther," "The Fish-Hawk," "The Lion-House" and "Earth" lie in the tradition of Blake and Thompson. How mad, innocent and divine Blake seems by comparison. The Wheelock animals are disembodied spirits betokening the self in relation to God, the supreme Poet. There is in fact too much talk about Beauty, the poet and his art, God and His Art. Capital letters abound on earth and in heaven. Beauty has no voice of her own; the poet describes her everlastingly, and calls attention to the process. He confounds the creator with the critic, the poet with the essayist. Aldrich, Stedman, Gilder and their generation had long since attacked Beauty with too many clichés, and reduced the elusive lady to a market woman whose body and soul they sold to commercial magazines. Wheelock's muse is no such strumpet. But she runs to the other extreme, is lifted to ethereal heights. She is no longer human, but supernal. One does not question Wheelock's integrity. The man is an artist untouched by mundane appeals. One only asks of his idealism, a little more reality, a more downright humanness, a less self-conscious concern with the universe, a little more humor in dealing with unearthly factors.

The last verse of "The Lion-House" renders the core of this poet:

> And O, my heart, what Doom,
> What warier Will has wrought

The cage, within whose room
  Paces your burning thought,
For the delight of Whom?

The poet does not despair, either in himself, or in the Higher Poet. "The beauty within me that is not mine" sustains him. He bears "the secret that holds the sky and the stars together," and a wiser Person speaks through his own. "Beautiful is the goal and beauty is the goad." The very love songs are addressed to the eternal in woman:

There is no room for death at all
  In earth or heaven above;
He never yet believed in death
  Who ever learned to love.

This is not a glib lyric, but the statement of a jubilant faith. When a thunderstorm crashes out of heaven, the thunder rolls the woman through his heart, and after the storm,

The lyre of heaven trembled
  Still with the thought of you,
The twilight on the waters,
  And all my spirit, too.

Here is an early New England divine with a modern, youthful difference: romantic love is part of the universal love, is indeed an earnest of the One in All, the All in One. This love has little or no reference to the physical; Swinburne and the flesh are far removed. In the fine, grave sonnet,

I do not love to see your beauty fire
The light of eager love in every eye,
Nor the unconscious ardor of desire
Mantle a cheek when you are passing by,

the poet concludes: " 'Tis not your beauty only that I love!" The concern with womanhood is a comparatively recent development in our poetry, the concern with sex still more recent. In Wheelock, love is a cosmic philosophy. One prefers the directer humanity of the other poets of the period. "All flesh must die, so all, now dust, shall live." "Splendid it is to live and glorious to die."

Realities come and go
  Like shadows on a pool,—
The leaves are for the wise man,
  The shadows for the fool.

But shadows, we know, are the workmanship of the sun striking leaves at varying angles. The man who studies shadows is no fool; he is gifted with a seeing eye. Wheelock addresses these lines "to the modern man." The modern man has learned to embrace all opposites, all apparent opposites. He is a truer thinker than Wheelock, and a truer poet. But Wheelock, when he leaves morality behind and sails straight into poetry, can write a lyric as human and beautiful as "Sunday Evening In The Common" (a walk with Van Wyck Brooks), or an ecstatic symphonic poem like "The Fish-Hawk." These six swinging stanzas move majestically and naturally. As larger vistas unfold, the reader is wafted along without interruption. He may apply his own interpretation to the cosmic scene. . . .

From the jocund, the optimistic, the exultant, the brassy, one turns, and turns with some relief, to the poet of enchantment and disenchantment: Conrad Aiken. He is probably the most distinguished Southern poet since Edgar Allan Poe; and Poe, lover, dreamer and musician, searcher of the horrible and grotesque, impassioned analyst of esthetic form, is Aiken's American forefather. Tragedy visited the Savannah poet early in life, and tragedy has haunted his subsequent movements from place to place, across the seas and back again. With him, as with Poe, nightmare is the one reality, and to the study of the unconscious at work in the dark, he brings a high order of psychology. Poe treated his manias with a technical equipment remarkable for its cold, clear insight into the throes of the psyche, and a musical statement, whether in verse or prose, of its battle for self-preservation. A scholar of the broadest, if not of the deepest calibre, Aiken does the same, aided by the latest discoveries of continental psychology. He is the psychoanalyst par excellence among American poets, and enough of an artist not to draw trite morals in the course of a narrative. Contrary

to Poe, Aiken believes in the larger forms. Though most of his narratives are monotonous for lack of variety, he has won a definite triumph in "Punch: The Immortal Liar." He has written as many long poems as Robinson, but like Robinson, he is essentially a lyric, not a dramatic poet. Both men lack the continuous passionate drive essential to epic writing; both distill their emotions with intellectual processes and present their characters in the half lights of a gray esthetic scheme. It takes more than gray estheticism to gather the full glories of a human tragedy. One admires the conscious artistry of an Aiken or Robinson narrative. The right thing is said in the right place, and the characters appear and disappear in a proper order. But the whole affair is a little too conscious and correct. One is rarely overwhelmed as one is in the cruder, less cultivated theatre of Eugene O'Neill. None the less, it was time for the intellect to appear in American poetry. Aiken's intellect, though not the equal of Robinson's or Eliot's, is a brilliant instrument. It produced many a stimulating essay on his fellow poets, essays rather chary in doling out praise, and forthright in indicating blemishes and weaknesses. The prose is always more forthright than Aiken's poetry. He is a better critic of other men than of himself. He is honest enough to dub his criticisms, "Skepticisms," and to note that his preferences and antagonism are guided by his own temperament. Inside his prejudices, he is a critic of integrity. And his prose is usually superb—a richer art than most of his poetry. His novel, "Blue Voyage," and his shorter fictions, though they lean on Joyce, Chekhov and Katharine Mansfield, are a further proof of this development.

At Harvard, Aiken was elected class poet in his senior year. Like many another precocious student, his early work betrays the influence of poets most loved by the scholar. "Earth Triumphant" belongs to the esthetic traditions of Keats and Poe, and to the realistic tradition of Masefield. Masefield gave way to Masters in "Turns And Movies," Masters to Fletcher, and Fletcher to Eliot—a classmate of Aiken's. "The Jig Of Forslin," 1916, is the first of the narratives. It is preceded by an accomplished preface, a preface more moving than the poem. "It is

an exploration of (man's) emotional and mental hinterland, his fairyland of impossible illusions and dreams: ranging, on the one extreme, from the desire for a complete tyranny of body over mind, to the desire, on the other extreme, for a complete tyranny of mind over body; by successive natural steps . . . in either direction." This is practically the main theme throughout Aiken's poetry—with the body triumphant and the mind disillusioned. The subtitle of the poem is, "A Symphony," for Aiken, like Fletcher, turned to music for an approximate poetic form. Aiken, at twenty-seven, was wise enough to break his poem into varying movements, and to permit "cacophonies" to break up the smooth pattern. But he was not wise enough or old enough to let reality thunder through the lines. Here we see a concern for "escaping gas," "patrician murder," "mermaids and lamias," and other paraphernalia out of Poe and Keats. The versification is skillful, so skillful that we are lulled by its mellifluous perfection, lulled altogether. No man has a finer technical equipment; the ease with which Aiken writes is astounding; most of his pages achieve finality in the first draft; and this facility enables him to write poem after perfect poem, essay and story after essay and story. Since 1914, he has published nearly fifteen volumes of poetry and prose. All of the books are well written, too well written.

"Nocturne Of Remembered Spring," "The Charnel Rose" and "The House Of Dust" are an improvement over "Forslin," partly because the narratives are shorter and the lyrical note most insistent. Though Eliot looms in the background, there is no mistaking the gradual emergence of Aiken in person. The Nocturne, with its moonlight and more moonlight, mist and more mist, love and more love and less love, dreams, balconies and roses, and its Cleopatra, Aiken's Cleopatra, moves through the gamut of the poet's besetting melancholia. "The Charnel Rose" contains his most popular narrative, "Senlin: A Biography"—another autobiography. But here, behind the "lust" and "dust," and "our futile modern sunlight" dancing like a harlot, we feel the accomplished despair of Eliot, prince of disillusionists. On the other hand, Eliot himself is a master in

combining borrowed styles and giving them the impress of his own personality. But he is subtle enough to escape charges of plagiarism. Aiken concludes, viewing his alter ego:

> Yet we would say, this was no man at all,
> But a dream we dreamed and vividly recall;
> And we are mad to walk in wind and rain
> Hoping to find, somewhere, that dream again.

Among the "Variations," there is the beautiful poem on Queen Cleopatra, a poem revealing his mastery of lyric forms:

> She poured cold poison into a cup
> And watched the thick foam wink and seethe:
> One black bubble upon her tongue
> And she would cease to breathe.
>
> She held the poison before her mouth . . .
> And saw the dark tomb hewed in stone
> Where a thousand nights would drift as one,
> And she would sleep alone;
>
> And lightly touched the goblet's rim,
> And thought, with a pleased and narrowed eye,
> Of this and that, and Antony,
> And of the laugh that will not die.

There is never more than a mention of laughter in Aiken. Nobody laughs in his poetry, the author least of all. Even a smile is grim or distorted, and the occasional humor wistful or skeptical. Sex runs through nearly every line, and the body and disillusion prevail. The mind can reach no conclusion, no serenity except in further defeat. Woman is a Medusa, a snake, a vampire, and man "immortally baffled." "The Charnel Rose" is a study in nympholepsy—"in a broad sense as that impulse which sends us from one dream, or ideal, to another, always disillusioned, always creating for adoration some new and subtler fiction." "Man is seen seeking in many ways to satisfy his instinct to love, worshiping one idol after another, disenchanted with each in turn; and at last taking pleasure not so much in anticipation as in memory."

She, whose mouth I was once so crazed in kissing,
Whose eyes were like deep fires,—
The grass that puffs in the fields is far more lovely;
Less than the dust is she to dead desires.

The symphony attempts to rise from "the merely carnal . . . through various phases of romantic or idealistic love, to several variants of sexual mysticism." But the mind never gains ultimate serenity. Serenity is the beginning of another illusion.

In Aiken's quest for absolute poetry or program music, he is closer to earth than Poe. His music may not be as original as Poe's, but it has more meaning: the beloved women are not so impalpable. We may feel them only through the poet's consciousness, his awareness of them solely through himself; but this is more than we grasp of the Lenores and Ulalumes. Aiken, hounded by the tragedies of sex, hemmed in by his own bone and brain, is in constant pursuit of clarities. There is such a thing as an over-obsession with sex; it is a Twentieth Century disease of colossal proportions, and a reaction, in part, against Nineteenth Century Puritanism. Scarcely an American poet, outside of Whitman, referred to sex, and Walt's sexual poems are unduly theoretical at times. Aiken's, self-centred though they are, embody erotic actualities. One sees the man, if not the woman, distinctly. One may wonder if this is the man's sole preoccupation: he lets us see it down to the last blooddrop. Sentimental moonlight invests the scene, but a man walks through it, pounding like a dynamo. Hopelessly wretched though he is, he faces himself and bares himself to the knife with unflinching psychology. Kraft-Ebing, Freud, Jung, Adler, are set to music, music discovered and sung by the patient himself. No surgeon could be more unsparing, nor perform a cleaner operation. If one cannot hear the patient cry out in his agony, it is because he is proud and completely restrained: an esthete superior to his emotions. The intellect is in full control of the passions and transcribes them in remembrance. Even the beginning of a love affair is treated as if it were already in the past, or en route to yesterday. Disenchantment embraces enchant-

ment about the same time the man embraces the woman. Death is in the very first kiss. "Priapus And The Pool," Aiken's loveliest book, is a mature expression of this tragic mood.

This volume contains fewer poetic clichés than the former volumes, fewer echoes of other poets. Though Aiken has been over this theme before and will go over it again, familiarity has mellowed the problem. The musician's hands are subtler, deeper, more poignant. Surfaces are as smooth as formerly, but they come out of modulations perfectly cadenced. The book is embryonic of the poet's entire quest as an amorist, a psychologist, an artist. Instead of another narrative, he gives us a volume of varied lyrics, each a facet of the internal dramatic scheme. Next to his masterpiece, "Punch," it is the poet's most dramatic offering, his most tragic book. It is a heartbreaking book. The title poem, still wedded to lusts and dusts, announces the main theme:

> Are we never to be left by our desires,
> But forever try to warm our foolish hearts
> At these illusory fires?

God is imaged as a derisive spirit shaping us "in the image of Priapus," and we grope about in "an ancient forest," searching "a pool of mysteries." Adoring poems follow, an adoration so profound, that the man, despite the language at his command, cannot express it. Silence were better, especially the silence of the woman. She must remain adored and remotely beautiful:

> Beauty too great it would be, that you should love me,
> Silence would crumble, the blue world shatter about us.

The third lyric, with its broad and bitter cadences, likens the lover to a "ridiculous sparrow" in the world's "futile red net of desire." The fourth is the delicate London lyric, "When trout swim down Great Ormond Street," and this is followed by the portrait of the girl, "This is the shape of the leaf, and this of the flower," a lyric composed of pure tenderness. Melancholia soon returns to the tune of the poet's favorite "phantasmal rain and snow." The seventh delves into the conversational method of Eliot, via Jules Laforgue, and closes on the

"infinite pain beneath our blessing." Presently, the poet compares his torment to Dante's, who "turned his torment to torture of a world let slowly die." But the modernist pain is akin to Poe's:

> But I shall hide my torment like a fever
> Within my breast, rejoicing when it feeds
> Upon my heart; then only being certain
> I live, when most my weak heart burns and bleeds.

A "desert of silence" follows, in which not even a blade of grass stirs. "The nights and days with an equal horror pass." The growing adoration must remain unexpressed. Suddenly the girl declares, "I love you so!"—and the poet is certain only a ghost has spoken. "Never again, after this dream, shall I be happy." "None stirs in the world save I." A poisonous note enters. He envisions a carver carving "a rose, a wing, a toad, a serpent's eye . . . the soft things that in hardness lie," and compares with this his own "dolorous art" carving a girl's head,

> Small, shapely, richly crowned with hair,
> Drowsy, with eyes half closed, as they
> Looked through you and beyond you, clear
> To something farther than Cathay . . .

The Medusa "could not see the world she turned to stone and ash," so he concludes:

> Better to carve a claw, a wing,
> Or, if the heart provide, a snake.

The adoration droops to abhorrence, and a deeper loneliness. The garden he walks is bitter now, utterly lamentable. He tears off the "offending heads" of flowers, crushes them "under my heel against harsh sands." The memory of the girl is driven from the garden. He has at last the strength to "drive you forth, pale ghost!" The flagellation is accomplished through whips of flowers, and the "proud sorceress, idolatrous self-worshipper" is flogged straight out of the heart's tabernacle. A new, more perfect idol replaces her, the one "more holy who is born of dream."

At last, at last all flesh-forgetful,
I pass, to make a dream my bride.
Come not! Lest when I find you,
Weeping I bind you,
Bandage your eyes, not lest they see
But lest they injure me:
Chain the strong hands and feet that were my joy
Not that I hate them but lest they destroy:
And dumbly watch you die, to praise that beauty
To which henceforth, I swear it by my love,
I owe all duty.

In a three-year-later edition of "Priapus," 1925, the poet has added some lyrics and ballads informed with a mounting power. The ballads derive their strength from "Punch"; they are in fact narratives in petto, and more compelling than the earlier, longer tales. Most are concerned with nightmares: "King Borborigmi," "And In The Hanging Gardens," "The Wedding," a sardonic picture of Tithonus, caught in the web of Arachne and devoured by her, "Psychomachia," "Elder Tree," and the gorgeous elegy over his own dead body, "Tetélestai." "Psychomachia" is a dark dialogue unfolding the sexual life of natural things, the flesh torn from flesh, the tongue plucked out. The landscape, with all its "nerves and voices," is a woman. And the heartbreak is no one man's; it is universal:

It is a sound of breaking,
The world is breaking, the world is a sound of breaking,
Many-harmonied, diverse, profound,
A shattering beauty. See, how together we break,
Hear what a crashing of disordered chords and discords
Fills the world with falling, when we thus lean
Our two mad bodies together!
It is a sound
Of everlasting grief, the sound of weeping,
The sound of disaster and misery, the sound
Of passionate heartbreak at the centre of the world.

Even death is sardonic, as the recent macabre ballad, "John Deth," testifies. Lust and dust are the principal rhymes. Punch, the bragging little puppet, blind to the strings that jerk him; Punch, the frustrated, wretched little human, symbolical

of all mankind, is at least deserving of a house beyond death, a deathless elegy:

> Build it in a kingdom far:
> In a forest green and deep;
> Where no tears nor sorrows are,
> But only song and sleep.
>
> There to the noise of wind in trees
> And many rivers winding down,
> Let him forget the cares of earth
> And nod a kingly crown!

Sex is the recurrent theme of Aiken's poetry, as it is now the main theme of most American literature and drama. From sex, the average author has taken the next steps to disillusion and despair, and a devotion to death and metaphysics. Of the gloomy era ahead, Eliot is the intellectual leader. But the time has not yet arrived for this man of mystery to take the boards. We must first consider some other poets who arrived ahead of him: women poets who carried on traditional lyrism, and a group of originals and eccentrics. Each contributed to the national renascence in poetry.

XXIII

WOMEN AS HUMANS, AS LOVERS, AS ARTISTS

O world, I cannot hold thee close enough!
Edna St. Vincent Millay.

IN turning to the group of women, one again endeavors to avoid too arbitrary an alignment and too narrow a range of hypotheses and conclusions. But, in a land where confession and autobiography, especially among women, is of comparatively recent origin, a separate study of a varied group has a definite interest in supplying data concerning a sex about which most American males are heartily ignorant. The average male poet can see but one side and just a little of the other side of the greatest human relation. We have to consult women for the other side—for the most part equally egocentric. Some women have other interests besides love and sex—notably Elinor Wylie, and in her we discern how deeply independent the feminine is. Each of the poets under discussion is an artist. Though practically all have gone to tradition for their poetic models, models once created by men, and none are as original as Emily Dickinson, the best members of the group have infused the old forms with personality. Compared with the conservative men of the period, the women are better craftsmen. This is due to the narrower range they set themselves. They are essentially lyric poets, confined to mastering the shorter forms.

The first name that comes to mind is Edna St. Vincent Millay's. Though she is the youngest poet of the group, she was the first to win fame and popularity: in her nineteenth year. "Renascence" should have won *The Lyric Year* contest of 1912; as it was, Miss Millay derived great benefit from the attacks the judges received for selecting Johns' "Second Avenue." 1912

was the opening year of the national renascence, and this girl made her début with a prophetic poem. "Renascence" is remarkable for its blending of naïveté and insight, its identification of the body and soul with the rounds of the earth, its mystical rapture, and most of all, for the absolute ease of its craftsmanship. The language has a slightly archaic tinge, partly reminiscent of Irish and Elizabethan balladry. In this girl from Maine, the old bards and harpists have found a modern voice: any one who has heard the three Millay sisters chant old ballads will know where the family came from. Edna Millay's first book was published in 1917. In addition to the title poem, it contains the famous "God's World," the delicate "Afternoon On A Hill," "Sorrow," and "Kin To Sorrow," "When The Year Grows Old," and the first of the sonnet groups in which some man is sent to the devil. All the ingredients are here: the love of life and beauty, the ecstatic pain, the identification with mankind and Nature, the devotion to grief, the faithless lover, the beginning of flippancy, and the ever-perfect technique. Miss Millay will develop her art along these strings.

"God's World" is akin to "Renascence," and closes on the Elizabethan cadence:

> My soul is all but out of me,—let fall
> No burning leaf; prithee, let no bird call.

In her will to embrace the universe, she suffered the accompanying agonies—as in "Renascence":

> For my omniscience paid I toll
> In infinite remorse of soul.
> All sin was of my sinning, all
> Atoning mine, and mine the gall
> Of all regret. Mine was the weight
> Of every brooded wrong, the hate
> That stood behind each envious thrust,
> Mine every greed, mine every lust.

Paganism is blended with the Christian conscience: an echo of Emily Dickinson's Transcendentalism. Miss Millay has made sorrow an attractive being; part of her popularity is due to the

love most readers have for sorrow. And when she does not feel sorrow, she can assume the rôle like an accomplished mime, thanks to her experience as an actress and dramatist. She is also an excellent comedienne, and can shift the masks of tragedy and comedy with a subtle sleight of hand, leaving her audience in tears either way. Even when she announces, "I will be the gladdest thing under the sun," we cannot be sure this adventure will end in joy. Sorrow is made the more attractive because it wears the things common people wear:

> All my thoughts are slow and brown:
> Standing up or sitting down
> Little matters, or what gown
> Or what shoes I wear.

Miss Millay's exquisite hand transmutes commonplace things to shining spirits. Commonplace is dropped into after a rapturous flight and sharp disappointment: "Love has gone and left me and the days are all alike." In the early sonnets, the form over which she is the supreme mistress after Mrs. Browning, a modern note comes to light: here is a girl, a woman, who does not kneel to her lover. It is curious too that the romance is usually described in the act of passing. The poet rehearses its momentary embraces, descends to grief, and rapidly rises to pride, scorn and noble elegies. She does not "stand stricken" long. Wit comes into her head and drives the fellow out of her heart, drives him, alas too often, with the utmost flippancy. In the fifth sonnet, riding in the subway and reading a neighbor's newspaper, she asks herself what would follow if she read that her lover "had happened to be killed."

> I should not cry aloud—I could not cry
> Aloud, or wring my hands in such a place—
> I should but watch the station lights rush by
> With a more careful interest on my face,
> Or raise my eyes and read with greater care
> Where to store furs and how to treat the hair.

This is all very well occasionally. One loves the wit in the woman; it is infinitely preferable to the sighing, dying ladies

of Poe's era. And one admires its independence of spirit, of judgment, of action. But, after her removal to New York, Miss Millay's wit played about the purlieus of Greenwich Village, and set up smart standards for a brood of jackdaws to echo. Hundreds of women have copied the flippant note; hundreds have turned hard-boiled: Miss Millay, and her leading pupil, Dorothy Parker, are responsible for these glib ladies.

This carping note is occasioned by Edna Millay's second volume, "A Few Figs From Thistles." There is something unworthily cute about some of these bits.

> And if I loved you Wednesday,
> Well, what is that to you?
> I do not love you Thursday—
> So much is true.

It is nothing but a stunt to shock the bourgeoisie, and shocking the bourgeoisie is poor fun for a poet of Miss Millay's genius. The ballad about "my true love's a rover" and "my true love is false" invites women to play the game as men play it. Hoping they do, one has premonitions that most women thrilling to these lines, hug them hard and then go to bed conventionally. Nor is the ballad as wicked as it seems. It has been written before and many times better. And the business of having "a little Sorrow, born of a little Sin," and confessing "I've been a wicked girl,"

> "But if I can't be sorry, why,
> I might as well be glad!"

makes one wonder how many girls have gone to Mephisto for this? This sort of thing has lured small-town lasses to the Village, and driven mature bohemians to respectable apartment houses. True bohemianism is hardy and healthy, never an attitude. Whitman, king of bohemians and child of Manhattan, was a lusty tramp. The "Four Sonnets," diabolically skillful technically, are Village sonnets. The poet pays back her "wanton, light and false" lover with—"I am most faithless when I most am true"—and

Whether or not we find what we are seeking
Is idle, biologically speaking.

For this sort of thing, we revert to the abler Restoration dramatists. Or to Oscar Wilde and "The Yellow Book." And yet, this book contains the delightful ballad, "Recuerdo." It came out of the heart of New York, out of two lovers riding "back and forth all night on the ferry." The climax is human and unforgettable:

We hailed "Good morrow, mother!" to a shawl-covered head,
And bought a morning paper, which neither of us read;
And she wept, "God bless you!" for the apples and the pears,
And we gave her all our money but our subway fares.

In "Second April," 1921, there is rejuvenation and advance. "The Blue-Flag In The Bog" echoes the mystic confidence of "Renascence." The poet's Wanderlust and love of Nature emerge again in "Journey," "Inland," "Travel," "Exiled." Her heart is warm with friends. "Yet there isn't a train I wouldn't take, no matter where it's going." Born in Maine and familiar with the sea, Miss Millay has the Yankee restlessness of Frost. "Caught beneath great buildings," the poet longs for "bobbing barrels," "weedy mussels," "wheeling gulls."

I am too long away from water.
I have a need of water near.

Then there is the elegiac note in which she has few American peers. In "The Poet And His Book," assured of her immortality as an artist, she challenges "mongrel Death":

You shall scratch and you shall whine
Many a night, and you shall worry
Many a bone, before you bury
One sweet bone of mine!

The finest of the elegies are in "Memorial To D. C.," a pal at Vassar. These are perfect bits of tenderness, especially "Prayer To Persephone," "Chorus" and "Elegy."

Lost in Hell,—Persephone,
Take her head upon your knee;

Say to her, "My dear, my dear,
It is not so dreadful here."

There are further poems in the old English manner: "Wraith," "Elaine," "Doubt No More That Oberon"; and further farewells to whilom lovers. Twelve love sonnets close the book, the most distinguished poetry in the collection. We feel this affair cannot last, but at least it does not end in bitter smartness. The opening sonnet rings in conventional comparisons with Isolde, Guinevere and Francesca. The second duplicates Aiken's theory: "Longing alone is singer to the lute." As early as the fourth, love is on the wane and memory begins. The fifth is a great sonnet. "A treacherous messenger, the thought of you comes to destroy me."

And once again, and wiser in no wise,
I chase your colored phantom on the air,
And sob and curse and fall and weep and rise
And stumble pitifully on to where,
Miserable and lost, with stinging eyes,
Once more I clasp,—and there is nothing there.

There is no acting here, but genuine grief and tragedy. The seventh and eighth sonnets are also great. The seventh is related to the fifth; the eighth echoes Shakespeare's conviction that the beloved, after death, will "wander down the air"—

It mattering not how beautiful you were,
Or how beloved above all else that dies.

The eleventh likens the lover's body to a "temple tenantless," to which the woman returns "even now, foolishly, knowing you are dead." The twelfth voices a proud farewell. Despite its dependence on classic allusions, this is a splendid sequence, and thoroughly womanly. Both lovers are invested with the dignity they deserve.

The next volume, "The Harp-Weaver," is an erratic collection. Except in the sonnets, the passion begins to wear thin: thespian antics mimic the former fire. Even disillusion and grief have a tinge of the theatrical, while the lyrism is no more than an accomplished echo of the old. The collection was awarded the

Pulitzer Prize for Poetry. The title ballad and some of the sonnets deserved the award, but not the body of the book, with its facile repetitions of popular Millayan modes, and its extensions of the smart, the cute and the pseudo sinful. Nor is the versification quite what it was. Careless lines make an unwelcome bow:

> "Heaven bless the babe!" they said.
> "What queer books she must have read!"
> (Love, by whom I was beguiled,
> Grant I may not bear a child.)

The group of poems in free verse, aside from "Never May The Fruit Be Plucked," are an unsuccessful experiment. And what bitter, wintry fruit this is! "The Ballad Of The Harp-Weaver," with its Irish tang, is the best of the Millay ballads. But one turns again to the sonnets in which her genius is most at home. Here again is love in the midst of separation, and love treated with a newer and angrier flippancy. "Love's bitter crust" is devoured and the dust embraced. "I know I am but summer to your heart" accepts the worm at the core. The furious sonnet, "Oh, oh, you will be sorry for that word!" closes on the famous line: "I shall be gone, and you may whistle for me." In another poem, the world "will know I love you, whether or not I do"—a poem in which the poet plays to her large audience. Sonnet XVIII is a parade of bedtime sardonics. The next is that Swinburnian confession which so many women readers have lived through vicariously:

> What lips my lips have kissed, and where, and why,
> I have forgotten, and what arms have lain
> Under my head till morning . . .

But there are several great sonnets: Numbers VI, XII, XIII, XX. There is always Beauty, Beauty greater than love, life or death. Like the disillusioned Aiken, Miss Millay has always this to carve. The final sonnet, the popular one on Euclid, expresses the poet's faith in the "massive sandal set on stone." "Sonnets From An Ungrafted Tree" is another sequence—written for the first time in the third person. It is a well-knit narrative that

lacks the passionate drive of the individual sonnets, or of the group in "Second April."

Edna Millay, the actress and dramatist, now enters the scene. She has written three poetic plays: "Two Slatterns And A King," an amusing little farce, "The Lamp And The Bell," a five-act Elizabethan romance of no particular consequence, and the masterly tragi-comedy, "Aria Da Capo." Though the traditional Pierrot, Columbine and shepherds reappear, the airy lines embody a savage satire on war. Recently, Miss Millay was chosen as the librettist for an American opera to be composed by the popular musician and critic, Deems Taylor, and to be produced by the Italian company at our own Metropolitan Opera House. The event was tremendously press-agented in advance, and from all accounts, a triumph greeted the final curtain. A fanatic on the subject of American poetic-drama and opera, I was unhappily unable to attend "The King's Henchman" and am therefore unable to offer a first-hand reaction to the work as a whole. I have read the libretto and heard some of the music in concert form, and must state my keen disappointment with both. The first objection is this: Was there no American theme, legendary or modern, the collaborators could have selected? Is there and has there not always been a human race on these shores with tragic material of its own? Dropping this plaint and accepting the libretto per se, I find myself in Anglo-Saxon England, and in the midst of a racy speech. So far so good. But what are these anachronistic locutions doing at the court of Eadgar: "A pretty mess he'll make of it!" "He maketh no bones of it." "I am fed to the neck with them." And the music I heard is a clever mélange of continental composers, ushered in by Wagner's chromatic Tristan. An American opera, set to Anglo-Saxon speech crossed with what sounds like Yankee slang, scored with echoes of Richard, King of Bayreuth, and produced on the stage of Giulio Gatti-Casazza's Milanese Metropolitan! I still remain loyal to American vaudeville, the Follies of Mr. Ziegfeld, the blues of Irving Berlin. Luckily, one hears rumors that Deems Taylor's next venture will be a setting of Elmer Rice's brilliantly indigenous "Street Scene." Rice is a

poet of the theatre, though he writes in prose. So far as Edna Millay is concerned, one reverts to "Renascence," to the early ballads and lyrics, the great sonnets and "Aria Da Capo," and prays that she will stifle her enormous popularity and develop the genius her native state gave her. She is still a young woman: there is time for her to mature in the grand manner she has always loved so well and not well enough. Her new book of poems, "The Buck In The Snow," the first to appear in five years, enjoyed three printings in one month. There is little here she has not written before, and written as well. The note is somewhat graver, more impersonal, the technical tapestry subtler. Otherwise, the book does not advance beyond the earlier volumes. Death is a favorite theme with Miss Millay, and she has made it popular with her readers. Her growing concern with the theme is in step with the younger generation, whose principal concern is also death. The title poem describes "an antlered buck and his doe standing in the apple-orchard." "Now lies he here, his wild blood scalding the snow."

> How strange a thing is death, bringing to his knees, bringing to his antlers
> The buck in the snow.
> How strange a thing,—a mile away by now, it may be,
> Under the heavy hemlocks that as the moments pass
> Shift their loads a little, letting fall a feather of snow—
> Life, looking out attentive from the eyes of the doe.

Sara Teasdale, Grace Hazard Conkling and Aline Kilmer are lyrists who have enjoyed considerable popularity, especially Miss Teasdale. Her work has been second only to Miss Millay's in the extent of the public response. As early as 1907, she published "Sonnets To Duse," and four years later, "Helen Of Troy." These were followed by "Rivers To The Sea," "Love Songs," "Flame And Shadow." The last is her best volume. Miss Teasdale's love poems are more restrained and quite as skillful as Edna Millay's. Melancholy, wistful, sentimental, they have been compared with Heinrich Heine's, because of epigrammatic similarities. But they lack the intensity, the power and irony of the German's masterly lyrics. The Teasdale songs are

closer to folk songs, handled with sophistication. Often their spontaneity is obvious, or depends on formulas the poet has employed many times before. Such poetry seems, on the whole, an excellent accomplishment, rarely a profound achievement. There are entirely too many Aprils, too many muted strings, too much wistfulness and weeping. This is most apparent in "Rivers To The Sea":

> Oh, beauty, are you not enough?
> Why am I crying after love?

If one sits with such poetry long, as one should in justice to her sincerity, one learns that Miss Teasdale has made a fine contribution to modern psychology: the discovery that there is no sharper loneliness than the loneliness of a woman beloved. In contradistinction to the Millay volumes, "Flame And Shadow" limns the beauty and silent loyalty of a man's love. There is no criticism of such devotion; nor does the woman demand a better love. She is simply and quietly grateful for all she has had of him, though her only solace comes from singing out of sorrow. One would say there is every occasion for joyous tumult, the ecstasy of self-forgetfulness; and yet, the very happiness and serenity of one truly loved, in this instance, breeds a cycle of mournful chants giving the impression that everlasting shadows engulf the spirit's flame. Even love

> Comes like a brooding and a baffled guest,
> And music and men's praise and even laughter
> Are not so good as rest.

Pride of mind sustains the woman through love's tragic tides. "It is my heart that makes my songs, not I." And loneliness is a glad thing if one can sing about it. This is the sole release, for there is no answer to the question: "Can I ever know you or you know me?" The baffled spirit does not rail at fate, drape itself in bitterness.

> Life, you have put me in your debt
> And I must serve you long—
> But oh, the debt is terrible
> That must be paid in song.

People reading her songs may sigh, "Poor soul, wistful soul, lonely night and day," and be unaware of the sustaining strength of love received and "hidden out of sight like a miser's gold." These poems say more about being loved than about loving, but this, after all, may be the woman's way, or one woman's way. More than one woman has an infinite capacity for being loved; nor is this true solely of American womanhood. "Flame And Shadow," with its broader, bolder movement, is an artistic expression of a woman who loves life "with a love too sharp to bear." This fine sonnet closes on a note of revelation:

> Life is my lover—I shall leave the dead
> If there is any way to baffle death.

In contrast to Sara Teasdale's, the love poems of Mrs. Conkling are tinged with irony and playful whims. The mind, as well as the heart, is at work here: the mind a delicate instrument. Like Leonora Speyer, another excellent ironist, Mrs. Conkling began her career as a musician, and her poetic uses of the sister art are always authentic. Like her friend, Amy Lowell, Mrs. Conkling has been a roamer of foreign places—especially of Mexico and the Spanish West Indies. Her poems are permeated with exotic sights and sounds in whose translation she owes a good deal to the Brookline empress. Though her art is not original, the New York poet, now living at Smith College, is an accomplished technician: I like particularly the cool surfaces of her poems. There is heat at the heart of things, but the heat is controlled. Though the poems are rarely buoyant, they do not suffer from monstrous melancholia. This woman feels that love does not last and is wary about loving again, but she does not topple into doldrums or demand more of man than man's limited nature can give. She is a mellow person and poet, lovely and wise, who has issued four quiet volumes: "Afternoons Of April," "Wilderness Songs," "Ship's Log," "Flying Fish." With each new volume, there is a further advance in artistry. Though her Nature poems depend on Robert Frost's, they are not the least of her accomplishments;

and the poems in which Nature sets the background for romance have a realistic basis. One is grateful for the poet's whims and humors. They reveal a person wary of egocentricity: the eternal masculine is seen by something beside the eternal feminine. She is fully aware that illusion plays a rôle in human relations: when the illusion wears off and the lovers go their ways, she castigates neither the man's eccentricity nor her own mistaken dream. Her conclusions are neither cheerless nor cheerful, but sensible:

> Forgive me now this hot impetuous brain
> Devising dreams forever. I would live
> More reasonably, be more sensitive
> To thought that is the mind's restoring rain
> Groping for roots of things. . . .

Aline Kilmer's muse is usually a bitter thing, but here too the poignancy has been mellowed by wisdom. A richer poet than Joyce Kilmer, she has written a number of lyrics in which a note of "atonement" predominates. It is our illusion that we have never given the dead the full love they merited. Mrs. Kilmer lays her singing agony at the feet of her soldier-husband. But she has no reason to long for death, as she does in "The Night Cometh," nor to speak of her garden as "a barren and a desolated land." There are the children, and for these she has spun such fine poems as "My Mirror," "For The Birthday Of A Middle-Aged Child" and "Experience." In the mirror, she beholds the ghost of her grandmother, the ghost of her mother and the future ghost of the child she feeds at night. The Birthday has a maternal badinage:

> You are not half so beautiful
> Since middle-age befell you;
> But since this is your birthday
> I suppose I mustn't tell you.

"Experience" has the same gentle raillery:

> For Deborah now is three, and oh,
> She knows so much that she did not know.

Most juvenile poems are sticky things written by saccharine sentimentalists. Mrs. Kilmer's are written by a mother who happens to be a poet. Nor is her concern with grief a tawdry, glib affair. Her rhythms rarely droop; they have a buoyant swing. She bears a hatred to things "instead of the love I had," but she knows "things have a terrible permanence when people die." She candidly confesses that poems made out of sorrow are often a "tour de force." Too many poets, especially women, capitalize their agonies. Thoroughly candid, too, are the poems to a rejected suitor. How much subtler this poem is than Miss Millay's farewell flippancies.

If I had loved you, soon, ah, soon I had lost you.
Had I been kind you had kissed me and gone your faithless way.
The kiss that I would not give is the kiss that your lips are holding:
Now you are mine forever, because of all I have cost you.

You think that you are free and have given over your sighing,
You think that from my coldness your love has flown away:
But mine are the hands you shall dream that your own are holding,
And mine is the face you shall look for when you are dying.

In dread of the "beaten foe," she bids him go, lest "in shame of victory, you find me kneeling at your feet." Aline Kilmer has issued four volumes: "Candles That Burn," "Vigils," "The Poor King's Daughter," "Selected Poems."

Gladys Cromwell and Hazel Hall died at the beginnings of maturity, and both are a decided loss to American poetry. Born in New York, a few years before Elinor Wylie, Miss Cromwell had the same preoccupation with inner things, the same austerity and precision. As her friend, Anne Dunn, has written: "Her life was little indented by outer events, being wholly of the mind and spirit." Despite this other worldliness, Gladys and her twin-sister, Dorothea, joined the Red Cross, and for eight months gave themselves to the labor of nursing wounded men on the battlefields of France. Prostrated with horrors which the peaceful portents of the Armistice in no wise mitigated, the sisters sailed homeward on the Lorraine. The

world "contained no refuge for beauty or quiet thought." Victims of post-war desolation, they threw themselves into the sea. They were given the Croix de Guerre by the French government. "Gates Of Utterance," 1915, and the posthumous "Poems" were Gladys Cromwell's only volumes. The latter, a book of high distinction, shared with Neihardt's "The Song Of Three Friends" the Poetry Society prize for 1919. Miss Cromwell was a poet of singular courage, pride and restrained power. A number of her poems are among the distinguished contributions to American literature, especially "Renewal," "Autumn Communion," "The Crowning Gift," "Folded Power," "The Mould." Her lyrics are so perfectly carved as to beggar analysis or emasculation. But the following quatrain from "Folded Power" gives the gist of her philosophy and a touch of her mastery of poetic form:

> Sorrow can wait,
> For there is magic in the calm estate
> Of grief; lo, where the dust complies
> Wisdom lies.

"Renewal" is a clearly molded sonnet in which "the concern of love is need . . . the fruit of patient grief." "I myself will grant the gift and prove what loving is." "Autumn Communion" is a tribute to the enduring beauty of Nature. "The Crowning Gift" is comparable with the best of Elinor Wylie, and "The Mould" with the best of Adelaide Crapsey's poems on death and the human will. Certain stark, feminine spirits had begun to emerge from our soil: Gladys Cromwell was one of them. Here is "The Mould" in full:

> No doubt this active will,
> So bravely steeped in sun,
> This will has vanquished Death
> And foiled oblivion.
>
> But this indifferent clay,
> This fine experienced hand,
> So quiet, and these thoughts
> That all unfinished stand,

Feel death as though it were
A shadowy caress;
And win and wear a frail
Archaic wistfulness.

The same note of bravery appears in Hazel Hall, the Minnesota poet who moved to Oregon in her childhood and spent all her days, after her twelfth year, in a wheel-chair. Ruth Hall has written to Untermeyer: "The word 'invalid' was anathema in her ears. . . . She possessed a rare abundance of health, which enabled her to know life concretely, as a satisfaction for her senses, even though it might remain an abstract sorrow for her mind." "Curtains" was her first book, and "Walkers"—a significant title—her second. That she wrote "concretely" is evidenced throughout her work. No doubt her senses were all the more active because of her paralytic imprisonment. There are many references to pedestrians. They are seen more clearly than they see themselves. "Footsteps"—"the tripping, lingering, and the heavy feet,"—moves along to the refrain: "Footfall, footfall." In "June Night," perfumed June comes into her room—

But hardly had her coming stirred
My darkness with a hope like dawn,
Or had my anxious silence heard
Her faint footfall, than she was gone.
She went as though with a quick fear
Of the eternal winter here.

Though "content in wintered days," she begs April to hush her "awakening feet." And, in a very light verse, she asks "tiptoeing twilight" to bathe her spirit as "dew bathes grass,"

That in your stillness
I may relight
My faith's frail candle
Before the night.

A preoccupation with sewing and stitching finds outlet in colloquies with her needle. Concrete images and abstract symbols hobnob. "Hands that guide a needle in their turn are led" by the hands of former women "who sewed their lives away." But

the rhythms of the hands are buoyant. Her address to "Any Woman" has a sorrowful theme, but the sorrow is ennobled by artistry. Hands appear and vanish as often as feet do. Though there be "nothing all day long" but the flight of a bird,

> The thin blue shadow of its wing
> May cross and cross above your hands.

Thus it goes,

> As Time's untiring fingers ply,
> And life is done.

Leonora Speyer, born in Washington of a New England mother and a Prussian nobleman, Count Ferdinand von Stosch, did not write poetry until she was past forty. Early in life, she became a concert violinist and played under Nikisch and Seidl. Later, she married Sir Edgar Speyer, a patron of musicians who aided Continental composers and raised music in London to a high artistic level. Mrs. Speyer's first volume, "A Canopic Jar," aside from the famous sonnet, "The Ladder," gave little evidence of the maturity which her second volume, "Fiddler's Farewell," would disclose five years later. The Lady Leonora began writing free verse of no real distinction. It was not until she turned to old forms invested with modern themes that she found her metier. "Fiddler's Farewell" won the Pulitzer Prize for 1926, a decision hailed with derision in some quarters. I was one of the private grumblers, but after reading the book in detail I am glad to take back the tempers of yesterday. The book is full of faults: there are a number of poeticisms, too many songs about wings and singing, too many flames and ashes. But the maturity of heart and brain, the "naked" candor, the growing mastery of varied versification—these are ample compensations. In the midst of her valiant femininity, Mrs. Speyer is a deft satirist of her fellows: she has revealed women with the grace of a comedienne. Her style is a blending of the passionate, the epigrammatic and the musical, and communicates a direct thought or emotion. At her worst, she is obvious; at her best, original. There are a number of unusual poems in the book: "I'll Be Your Epitaph," "Onlooker," "Little Lover,"

"Kleptomaniac," "To A Song Of Sappho Discovered In Egypt," "The Story As I Understand It," "New England Cottage," some of the quatrains, "Oberammergau," and "Protest In Passing" (a finer sonnet than "The Ladder").

"Little Lover" and "Kleptomaniac" are brilliant satires, the former dainty and catty, the latter large and powerful. "Kleptomaniac" is a triumphant portrait of a woman who slowly steals each of a man's possessions. Finally, she droops in contrition and implores his forgiveness:

> As he forgave she snatched his soul;
> She did not want it, but she stole.

The ballad about Sappho is better than most poems about the Lesbian, and the story about Eve and the forbidden tree, an improvement over the customary Christian morality. And how compelling are the closing verses of "Two Passionate Ones Part":

> Grieving impetuous passionate two—
> Here was a feast on the white cloth spread,
> Love was the wine, and liking the bread.
>
> You drank and drank, but you ate no crumb;
> Love was the wine, but ah, the bread,
> Had you dipped it deep in the cup instead.
>
> Pale-lipped lovers that taste the lees,
> Dull, undrinkable, stale and flat,
> How the good crust had sweetened these—
> Pity you never thought of that!

"Oberammergau," a winner of the Charleston Blindman prize, opens with a satire on varied classes of people on the way to see Christ crucified in the theatre, and ends with the abrupt dissonance:

> Doubter—dreamer—which am I?
> Lord, help Thou mine unbelief!

"Protest In Passing" is a majestic sonnet in which the spirit parts with the flesh and its "masonry of muscle, blood and bone."

> I go—but pause upon the threshold's rust,
> To shake from off my feet my own dead dust.

An earlier satiric lyric serves as a fitting conclusion to the present comment. The light little thing is an attack on women who capitalize their agonies with tears and tear-songs.

I chose two nouns
And an adjective
To make my pale tear thrive.

I urged my tear
To an unctuous rhyme,
And sold it for a dime.

I sold the tear
That wept for you;
It's a thing that poets do.

Marjorie Allen Seiffert and Jean Starr Untermeyer, like Mrs. Speyer, turned from music to free verse and then to metrical verse. And Rose O'Neill turned from art to free verse and then to metrical verse. Mrs. Seiffert is most at home in balladry, Mrs. Untermeyer in love songs, Miss O'Neill in Celtic fantasies. Mrs. Seiffert has issued two books: "A Woman Of Thirty," "Ballads Of A Singing Bowl." Though she enjoys singing about tragic things and is haunted by Beauty growing older, she has the temperament of a comedienne, and I should like to see her indulge this vein more often. Bitterness and disillusion may seem more poetic than comedy, but comedy is the rarer art in this country. And the work of disillusioned women depends on too many conventional styles, whether in free or rhymed verse. "The Old Woman" is a delightful morality play only five pages long, but they render the gamut of beauty gone to the grave and beauty renewed in a younger woman. The scene takes place in a boarding house and crackles with subtle humor. Mrs. Seiffert's free verse is not as good as her debonair balladry, nor are the poems of Elijah Hay equal to those of Emanuel Morgan or Anne Knish: the Seiffert, Bynner and Ficke triumvirate of the Spectric hoax on free versification. The ballads have an undercurrent of melancholy and despair. Among the most persuasive are: "Ballad Of Thread For A Needle," "Ballad Of The Rag-Bag Heart," "Ballad Of The City Of Mirth," "Bal-

lad Of Riding," "Ballad Of The Hurdy-Gurdy," "Ballad For A Middle-Aged Lady." Here are typical passages from the "Hurdy-Gurdy":

> Spring's an old man, bent and brown
> Selling music and balloons
> To the people of the town.
>
> Since his music is the cry
> In their flesh and blood and bones,
> All the young folk pass him by. . . .
>
> But the older people spill
> Silver coins into his hat
> For a reminiscent thrill.

Rose O'Neill has published one volume of poems: "The Master Mistress." Clement Wood calls her a sister of Campion and writes that for "sheer lyric utterance she is matched by none of our poets." Miss O'Neill has as much rapture as the rapturous Wood claims for her, but her utterance is erratic and is drenched with poeticisms from the past. Scarcely a poem is consistently carried through: ecstasies are interrupted by bookish expressions. The matter is often superb enough, but the manner does not achieve an ultimate form, except in such instances as "Follow the flying dead"—a swinging lyric. The virtues and faults of Rose O'Neill may be found in the following stanza:

> I bring this weight of savage singing here,
> Fitting for you who feast upon fierce things,
> Like to one running in a wood in fear
> And triumph terrible, who strongly brings
> A bright beast held beneath his rended breast.
> Hilarious distress
> Of Spartan folly fainting with its prize,
> Of tearing trophy, burning boon and glee!
> But, oh, arise,
> And get me from my fanged captive free!
> Oh, come, oh quickly lift the cloak, and see
> Him gleaming, ere too deep he diggeth me.

Although Mrs. Untermeyer's poems are partly in free verse and partly in rhymed, her true tradition lies in the Old Testa-

ment. Hebraic passion, austerity and moral fervor are the dominant notes in her poetry. It is indomitably straightforward, gravely musical and carefully, almost too carefully wrought. In a land of over-productiveness, it is a pleasure to come upon work so thoroughly considered before publication. Though she has written for many years, Mrs. Untermeyer has issued but two books: "Growing Pains," 1918, "Dreams Out Of Darkness," 1921. For her later poems, one has to consult magazines and anthologies. Considering their long intimacy—they were married in 1907—no two poets could be more different than the Untermeyers. In "Gothic," Jean refers to Louis' gargoyles, arabesques and happy scrollery:

> Though I may labor with a fervor that
> Is mediæval in its piety,
> Completion finds my temples gaunt and flat,
> Cold and erect. But in satiety
> Of sternness, I must turn to you, I find,
> To ornament the Gothic of my mind.

The serenity of her idealism is everywhere apparent. She has worked in "stubborn rock" throughout, in an effort "to recall the granite strength of my desire." She is profoundly self-centred, profoundly the woman, the lover, the wife, the mother. There is no compromise here, least of all with herself. She faces people and problems with complete courage and honesty. The jocund, the light, the transitory, have little room in her proud life; and her love is a possessive flame, "a glowing armor for all to see." She is determined to be her own creator and celebrate her "passion for Beauty." And a human being breathes inside these ideals. In such poems as "Clothes," "Resignation," "Rebuke," "A Teacher," "Gifts" (out of her first book), we find an awareness of others, sympathy and pity, even humility: "I have so little art."

> I am so poor in gifts,
> I have so few light-hearted hours,
> So little fantasy to lead you on strange quests,
> So little beauty to refresh your eye.

But pride returns to the battle: she is "the tender fortress of content, the radiant harbor of desire." In "Birth," the woman realizes "the terror and the triumph of that loneliness," "the exultation" and "fertile pain" that enclose the greatest hours of experience. She writes no songs for an "idle lute."

The testamental honesty, nudity, simplicity, advance with growing power. In "Lake-Song,"

> The lapping of lake water
> Is like the weeping of women,
> The weeping of ancient women
> Who grieved without rebellion.

It is like "the fertile tears of women that water the dreams of men." "Sinfonia Domestica" is an impassioned acceptance and denunciation of marriage. "Even at Heaven's threshold," she will meet her lover "with ewer and basin, with clothing and with food." "Anti-Erotic" is a plea for the man's shoulder and gentle hand; and in "Rebirth," she sees herself worthy of reverence, calls herself "Woman—and Holy." "Rebirth" demands that we lay aside "old love like the garments of our childhood," while "Little Dirge" clamors, in contradiction: "Youth is slipping out the door"; "My goal is beckoning from a safe hearth-fire." The morality play, "Eve Before The Tree," is the longest and most beautiful of Mrs. Untermeyer's poems. It has passion, dignity, human warmth and womanhood. Then there are the lovely poems about Dick Untermeyer, of which "Lullaby For A Man-Child" is characteristic:

> The mountains waver through my tears,
> Hush, my son—
> The trees are bending at the knees
> Like women broken by the years.
> But you, my child, need have no fears;
> Only for Woman, love has spears.
> Sleep, my son.

This is feminine lyrism of a high order, and the work of Jean Starr Untermeyer deserves a place well above places accorded to many more popular poets. . . .

The despair and disillusionment setting in after the World War found its most tragic voice abroad in T. S. Eliot. On this side the Atlantic, it found a feminine counterpart in the marvelous brain of Elinor Wylie. Her work was not a direct reaction to the aftermath, but was raised on the private life of an aristocratic nature in no wise akin with the mob or democracy. Among the new aristocracy of intellects rearing ivory towers out of independent domiciles, Eliot was the prince, Elinor Wylie the princess. Each has had a long line of retainers and imitators. The despair of the woman was a positive thing; it was composed, not of self-pity, but of heroic acceptance. A proud person does not trouble himself with improving or reforming life. If he is an esthete, he evades humanity and fashions replicas of himself in beautiful stones, songs, poems. Fairly soon, the esthete turns to a consideration and adoration of death. He turns mystic and metaphysician, studies the dark, attempts communication with angels and demons, interprets all things in the light of the grave and beyond. Life and the world are imperfect; there is nothing to do but study the microcosm, see it unflinchingly, perfect it supremely, shape one's transitory days into an art for art's sake, an art in league not with mortality, but immortality. Metaphysicians rear their systems on a species of insanity with an extraordinarily brilliant logic no sane man can answer. And these esthetic mystics support their mad reasoning with a magnificent range of cultures out of the past—out of dead mystics strangely reborn in the present. The gorgeous cultural equipment of Elinor Wylie was based on such metaphysicians as Webster, Donne, Blake—and latterly, Eliot. To these she added her own spirit and an intellectual equipment comparable, according to Mary Colum, with the visionary sainthood of "Theresa, and Catherine, and Hildegarde."

I have heard that William Rose Benét was reading the death scene of Mrs. Browning when his wife was mortally stricken with paralysis. A day or two before her death, she had arranged her last collection of poems, "Angels And Earthly Creatures," and taken it to her publishers. In the course of seven swift years, she had finished four volumes of verse and four of

prose. Then the mad flame sank. Her poetry books are "Nets To Catch The Wind," "Black Armour," "Trivial Breath" and the posthumous volume. "Nets To Catch The Wind" is an unusual first volume that owes its power to the maturity of the woman behind it. It contains a number of lyrics and ballads unique in their hard clarity. The opening poem declares that Beauty has "the hard heart of a child." Then comes the didactic ballad, "The Eagle And The Mole," in which we are told to

> Avoid the reeking herd,
> Shun the polluted flock,
> Live like that stoic bird,
> The eagle of the rock.

Here are the leading notes of Elinor Wylie: the aristocratic scorn, the penetrating language, the adoration of symbolical animals, the concern with "disembodied bones," the perfect craftsmanship. As a craftsman, she has few peers and no superiors in our poetry. "Madman's Song," a hunting song inspired by the "milk-white hounds of the moon," the Blakian "Lion And The Lamb," "Winter Sleep," with its hatred of a world "wicked and cross and old," "Escape," with its longing for "a little house" where "you may grope for me in vain," "A Proud Lady," with its refrain that the world, "with hard finger tips" has "chiseled and curled" the "inscrutable lips"—these are lyric diaries of a spirit determined to live apart and carve its own life and art. "The Tortoise In Eternity," bearing "the rainbow bubble earth square on my sorrowful back," is Elinor Wylie in person. But she is not completely blind to her surroundings. "A Crowded Trolley Car" is a work of imaginative realism in which the passengers are seen, "hanging by the hands," as if swinging from rope, the while their

> Glances strike and glare,
> Fingers tangle, Bluebeard's wives
> Dangle by the hair.

The lyric concludes:

> One man stands as free men stand,
> As if his soul might be

Brave, unbroken; see his hand
Nailed to an oaken tree.

Proverbial feminine softness is absent here. And the title of the second volume, "Black Armour," is hardly feminine. Neither is the book masculine, except for the incisive intellectual power of its bold images. Indeed, most of Elinor Wylie's poetry is epicene. At times, she rages against the "carnal mesh," or wearies of her "mischievous brain," her body a battleground of cruel, opposing forces. In "Prophecy," there is a further longing for a woodland hut where at the last, the wind may "set his mouth against a crack and blow the candle out." And in "Song," a further hope that

My soul will stop creeping
Through my jewelled brain . . .

and a reaching out to "dumb faces and the dusty ground." Though she is "weary forever and ever of being brave," bravery continues. One is not amazed that the swaggering ballad, "Peregrine," was composed by her. This "liar and bragger" who "had no friend"

Except a dagger
And a candle-end,

and who fondles "nature's breast, not woman," is "a good fighter, but a bad friend," "a good hater, but a bad lover." Again one pays homage to the masterly versification: the firm hard line and original rhymes—rhymes sometimes strained for originality. Fortunately, there are contradictions in the work of Elinor Wylie. Just as one pronounces finalities about her nature, one finds she is not heartless, not inhuman, not epicene—but a woman, lonely, though proud. In a superb lyric, she renounces a former comparison with the eagle:

I was, being human, born alone;
I am, being woman, hard beset;
I live by squeezing from a stone
The little nourishment I get.

And the patrician personality asks no charity. The "impressive" hand "preserves a shape too utterly its own." "Fable" is

a ballad full of devastating images of a white raven "dipping her beak" in the blood of a knight. The ballad is Poesque in its piling of the grotesque on the horrible, and is not unrelated to Keats' "La Belle Dame Sans Merci." "Castilian" is a brilliant portrait of the portrait-painter, Velasquez. It vies with Browning's portraits of artists and escapes the optimistic smudges of an ultimate Victorian moral. "Sequence" is a poem in six austere, rather vague stanzas. Though love is not referred to concretely, one receives an impression that something has gone to its grave, and possibly a man or two.

> And I am barren in a barren land,
> But who so breaks me, I shall pierce his hand.

Here is none of Miss Millay's farewell flippancy. Though Elinor Wylie is equally self-centred in the same situation, it is clear to her that the man must "go his way, in agony and sweat, because he could not pity nor forget." The penultimate stanza is a triumph in proud self-revelation:

> For various questions which I shall not ask,
> And various answers which I cannot hear,
> I have contrived a substituted task
> To prove my body is devoid of fear;
> To prove my spirit's elemental blood
> Is pure, courageous, and uniform,
> I shall submerge my body in the mud,
> I shall submit my spirit to the storm;
> I shall bend down my bosom to the snake,
> As to an infant for its father's sake.

"Trivial Breath" opens with a Dedication to the English language—"that conduit whose veins are threaded with pellucid truth!" And to this tongue she devoted herself from infancy: "The woman never wandered in vile devotion to a lesser prince." As Elinor Wylie was an inveterate reader of classical English, so her development as an artist grew more and more literary, less and less concrete. Her last two books are subtler esthetic productions than the first two, and still farther removed from ordinary existence. Fine-spun abstractions thread an exquisite tapestry, a more-than-human, less-than-human design. Dream-

ing "no ill of Death," the artist concerns herself with metaphysical ghosts, with extinction of the body and the trumpeting of dust. But the balladist continues to expound powerful chants in "Peter And John," "The Innocents," "A Strange Story," "The Puritan's Ballad," "As I Went Down By Havre De Grace." "A Strange Story" and "Malediction Upon Myself" are tributes to the London which became the capital of her wandering spirit during the later years. "A Strange Story" owes its charm to a traditional play on names of places: old quarters in which the poet assumes she has died: Berners Street, Houndsditch, Holborn, Marleybone, Lincoln's Inn, Bloomsbury. The heroic mood pervades "Unwilling Admission," "False Prophet," "Hospes Comesque Corporis," "Address To My Soul," "Last Supper," "Lament For Glasgerion." The soul remains securely serene in the midst of planetary wars.

> Five-petalled flame, be cold:
> Be firm, dissolving star:
> Accept the stricter mould
> That makes you singular.

Here is the didactic note of the older metaphysicians, reborn in Elinor Wylie, reborn again in her disciples. Nor does the head droop in the face of advancing time:

> The vanishing dust of my heart is proud
> To watch me wither and grow old.

The final volume, most of which was written in England, has a surprising return to the feminine: the clearest revelation of the woman the poet ever revealed. But the metaphysical note persists: reaches its deepest, most abstract, most poignant and beautiful tones. The slender book is divided into four groups: a sequence of nineteen sonnets to "One Person," "Elements And Angels," "Earthly Creatures," "Elegies And Epistles." The earthly creatures have an unearthly, English air. The ballad of "Robin Hood's Heart" is a disguised ballad; so are "The Mountaineer's Ballad" and "Hughie At The Inn." The valiant Hughie combating enemies, seen and unseen, is Elinor Wylie.

"Bread Alone" is a perfect lyric, in which the woman humbles herself because of a heart that "is not great."

> Ah, poor machine, and faithful,
> That limps without a wing!
> My love, be never wrathful
> With this imperfect thing.

The sonnet sequence is a confession of love, adoration and faith in an Englishman, and the prefatory sonnet a proud prophecy:

> *The ashes of this error shall exhale*
> *Essential verity, and two by two*
> *Lovers devout and loyal shall renew*
> *The legend, and refuse to let it fail.*

That this love should have come just before death, and be most clearly revealed, is a characteristic coda to a life lived intensely and fearlessly. And now the lover, not the woman, becomes the symbolical eagle, and the woman a "hound for faithfulness." Pride, scorn and the ego have grown humble:

> Now do I grow indignant at the fate
> Which made me so imperfect to compare
> With your degree of noble and of fair;
> Our elements are the farthest skies apart;
> And I enjoin you, ere it is too late,
> To stamp your superscription on my heart.

The "Platonic mind" gives way "to those sharp ecstasies the pulses give." Even so, "both soul and body are unfit to apprehend this miracle, my lord!" Deepest of all is the will not to hurt:

> What voice can my invention find to say
> So soft, precise, and scrupulous a word
> You shall not take it for another sword?

Elsewhere she asks him for strength to "set me where I bear a little more than I can bear." No matter what the outcome, she lives triumphant and will die the same,

> Upon the fringes of this continent,
> This map of Paradise, this scrap of earth
> Whereon you burn like flame upon a hearth.

Such metaphysical poems as "Chimæra Sleeping," "Absent Thee From Felicity Awhile," "O Virtuous Light," "Hymn To Earth," "This Corruptible," are probably the finest ever written by Elinor Wylie. "O Virtuous Light" hovers on the verge of insanity. "Where the slow miracles of thought take shape through patience into grace"—

> This light begotten of itself
> Is not a light by which to live!

The body—heart, brain and spirit—must be translated into clay. For epitaph, we need not go beyond the poet herself: the woman-artist so intimate with death and the death in living:

> Farewell, sweet dust; I was never a miser:
> Once, for a minute, I made you mine:
> Now you are gone, I am none the wiser
> But the leaves of the willow are bright as wine.

XXIV

ORIGINALS AND ECCENTRICS

What syllable are you seeking, Vocalissimus . . .
Wallace Stevens.

IN turning back to the body of the free verse movement, I have attempted divisions similar to the grouping of conservative poets: those whose promise has not been developed, those who wrote poems worthy of memory, and those whose names still persist, whose work entitles them to the respect we pay to the Imagists, Sandburg and Masters. Again, I am reduced to fairly arbitrary lists I do not hold infallible. I shall be happy to find myself soundly contradicted by the poetry of poets I underestimate or by critics who delight in disclosing the frailties of pseudo critics. I have selected thirty-five names. Nine are definitely individual: Adelaide Crapsey, Mina Loy, Marianne Moore and Lola Ridge; Maxwell Bodenheim, E. E. Cummings, Wallace Gould, Wallace Stevens and William Carlos Williams. The group just below contains nine poets who have done excellent things and who may still develop beyond classified confines: Jeanne D'Orge, Helen Hoyt and Evelyn Scott; Emanuel Carnevali, H. L. Davis, Arturo Giovannitti, Haniel Long, James Oppenheim and Lew Sarett. Among the remaining poets, there are some who have stopped writing and some who have distinguished themselves in other fields: Mary Aldis, Mary Carolyn Davies, Frances Gregg and Clara Shanafelt; Walter Conrad Arensberg, Robert Carlton Brown, Skipwith Cannéll, Marsden Hartley, Horace Holley, John Russell McCarthy, Max Michelson, David O'Neil, John Reed, Pitts Sanborn, Robert Alden Sanborn, William Saphier, Adolf Wolff. The third group is the hardest to handle. With the exception of Reed, these men and women are still alive. A man who attempts final judgments leaves himself open to ultimate burial by some one he has tried

to inter. Again I have to say, I do not approach these people as a funeral director, but as a fallible person tracing evaluations among poets who have not developed an early promise. Almost all of these poets were friendly contributors to a venture of mine called *Others:* 1915 to '18. I revert to those turbulent years with the queerest emotions.

Mary Aldis and Frances Gregg have developed their talents elsewhere: the former in playwriting, the latter in fiction. Mrs. Aldis has a distinguished poem to her credit, "The Sisters." Miss Gregg was one of the earliest Imagists. Miss Davies first arrived with a group called "Songs Of A Girl." The group filled me with a delight which has since been dampened by the dozens of jingling things on a further girlhood she has dashed off for popular magazines. The delicate cameos of Miss Shanafelt have been overshadowed by the superior work of the original Imagists. Among the other disciples of Imagism, one finds Arensberg, Cannéll, Hartley, Holley, Michelson, O'Neil, the Sanborns, Saphier and Wolff. Some of these men brought notes of their own to the movement. Cannéll and Holley were present at the birth of Imagism in London; Cannéll gave it a Nietzschean and Holley a religious flavor. Both stopped writing years ago. These two nomads, returning to New York with glamorous tales, gave me the first human contact with American affairs abroad. Arensberg, an intimate friend of Donald Evans, of Stevens, of the Sanborns, of the *Rogue* group in the Village, and of the latest foreign painters and composers to visit our shores, conducted a sybaritic salon to which I was cordially invited. The birth of *Others* came out of repeated consultations with Arensberg: vide "Troubadour." A profound classical scholar and reticent esthete, he made each new movement his own, tried it awhile and then dropped it: Symbolism, Imagism, Vorticism, Cubism, Dadaism. Though he wrote fine poems in free verse, "Voyage A L'Infini," "The Voice Of One Dead," "For Forms That Are Free," and vied with Guilliame Apollinaire, the Parisian playboy, in such audacious things as "Ing," Arensberg was radical solely in theory. Before the war, he had distinguished himself in traditional forms (vide "Poems" and "Idols"), and in

superb translations from such French gods as Baudelaire, de Nerval, Verlaine, Mallarmé, Laforgue. He has written sonnets, portraits, lyrics and quatrains with an aristocratic gesture and perfect craftsmanship. The poems are compact of subdued emotion and sheer thought beautifully evolved: the scholar is everywhere the soul of Arensberg. Here is a quatrain revealing the dual nature of the man and artist:

> I hear the wings, the winds, the river pass,
> And toss the fretful book upon the grass.
> Poor book, it could not cure my soul of aught—
> It has itself the old disease of thought.

Had Marsden Hartley ever cared to devote his life to literature, he would have enriched our poetry as he has enriched our painting. His writings are the work, or rather the pleasure, of a gifted amateur on a holiday. "Salutations To A Mouse" shows the wisdom of the Maine artist in not embracing poetry with professional solemnity. The "mouse makes a nest" of his words and faces the winter with them:

> I did not suspect them
> Of such worth against the cold.

Max Michelson, a foreign member of the Chicago *Poetry* group, had to give up writing because of ill health and the economic problem. Inside his awkward English, he brought an exotic tone to Imagism. His poems on girls and women have a warm sincerity colored with occasional ironies. William Saphier and Adolf Wolff likewise brought Europe to American Imagism—Rumania and Russia. Saphier, who is also a painter and machinist, was a member of the Chicago group at a time when Bodenheim was its self-appointed pariah. The Rumanian began by imitating the eccentric Max, but ultimately evolved a style notable for its folk-like simplicity and richness of images. Unhappily, Saphier had to give up poetry and painting in the interests of a saner livelihood. Wolff, beginning with a book for whose publication the present author was responsible—"Songs, Sighs And Curses"—went in for red rebellion and then went out again. From a conscientious objector he rose to an upright

American citizen. During a sojourn on Blackwell's Island, Wolff wrote a pungent series of poems called "Prison Weeds." America found a truer rebel in the poet, John Reed. The glorious Jack turned his poetry into action, and died in the Russia which has honored him with a monument his own land should have erected. Most of our radicals seem pale pamphleteers and parlor intellectuals in comparison. It was Reed's secret ambition to return to poetry after the battle. He went down at a time when some of his Manhattan allies, wistfully yearning for freedom, began writing popular novels and Hollywood scenarios. Robert Carlton Brown was another adventurer. The daredevil globetrotter tried his gay hand at free verse and, for a moment or two, scribbled a host of absurdities antedating Cummings' eccentricities. Brown's poem on Aladdin is hilarious and rhythmical. He carried his love of ostentation to the most grotesque degree:

> I like to hear a nose blown with a bang
> See teeth picked with a flourish
> Watch a fat lady wabble her cargo of flesh
> As though it were worth a thousand dollars an ounce.

The vagabond appeared, waved his hands like a prestidigitator and then disappeared. He is a genuine loss to American nonsense. John Russell McCarthy is a loss to American atheism. For awhile, he conducted a single-handed combat against the Almighty, a combat summed up in the quatrain:

> How can any god be happy
> With only one hell?
> Why, even a dog has different teeth
> To crush this flea or that flea.

Pitts Sanborn, after a long career in musical criticism and a short career in poetry, vide "Vie De Bordeaux," has come into his majority with the novel, "Prima Donna." His namesake, Robert Alden, gave more promise as a poet, but like Pitts, has given up poetry. Especially fine are R. A. Sanborn's poems to children and, strangely enough, his prose poems on fighters and ball players. Relentless economic pressure has forced his atten-

tion elsewhere. With David O'Neil, we come to the end of the first group. A member of the St. Louis group, this poet is a kind of Chinese Imagist, an epigrammatic philosopher, a retired Missouri lumberman who plants perfect acorns. His stark, short lines are pregnant with emotion and double meanings. A tragic loss is implied in "The Oak":

> Gaunt,
> Stripped of leaves,
> Death-defiant
> In this thought:
> There is nothing more to lose.

An artist in "Infinity" is defined as "a silkworm on a slender strand in a gale." "Vernal Showers" contains the essence of ethics:

> At the rude goodness
> Of the rain
> The flowers wince,
> But drink.

Fortunately, O'Neil is still writing.

Jeanne D'Orge, Helen Hoyt and Evelyn Scott are radical love poets. Miss D'Orge, so far as I know, has never published a book. Nor has she earned the recognition she deserves. Miss Hoyt issued a volume of passionate poems, "Apples Here In My Basket," and then vanished from the poetic scene. Mrs. Scott's one volume, "Precipitations," has been overshadowed by her series of psychologic novels, the most recent of which, "The Wave," has been chosen by The Literary Guild. Miss Hoyt is an ecstatic celebrant of the glories of desire and the flesh. Her poems are frankly physical, feminine, clear and clean. They are in the tradition of Whitman's "Children Of Adam." Sex is always viewed with the reverence worthy of sex, as in "Homage." I cannot account for Miss Hoyt's lack of recognition except on the ground that, a few years ago, any printed mention of the divine relation was still hailed as pornography. Our Puritan ancestry asserts itself even now, when sex is the main theme of American literature. There is never anything flagrant

or sensational in the writings of the Wisconsin poet. She is not conscious of an audience, nor desirous of shocking the bourgeoisie. Her rapture is the essence, not of Puritanism or anti-Puritanism, but of purity:

> We never left our love unsaid,
> But always made it plain with speech.

Nor is the language merely impulsive. Thought, as well as passion, directs the firmly molded composition. Here is a poem called "Riddle":

> Physical,
> So that nothing is more of the flesh;
> Yet spiritual,
> So that nothing is so wholly spiritual.
>
> Without dignity,
> Awkward, uncomely;
> Yet of majesty equal with death and birth
> And sacred with them.
>
> Solemn,
> What is more gay?
> (With almost the gaiety of childhood)
> Simple and swift and brief,
> What in all the world is longer,
> More intricate of result?

Though it is the greatest desire, and the one most fled from, and "seeming utterly new" to each new man and woman,

> Yet the property,
> Common as dust,
> Of all the millions of the world;
> Old as life.

Jeanne D'Orge, a student of the passions in relation to wedlock, has written a series of exquisite ironies on the perennial husband. The charm of her male portraits lies in the artistic arrangement of a few innocent details whose sum is annihilating. Her ironies are also directed at women and at the God of passions. In "The Convent," we discern that the yearning of "a wildcat novice" has been implanted by the Creator: "Nice to be

God." Of the poems on the marital relation, "The Problem Is," "Portrait" and "Criss-Cross" unveil the illusions behind which a man enjoys domesticating his lady. "The Sewing Bee" is a gently devastating analysis of gossiping females. "Stolen," "The Enchanted Castle" and "The Little Tailor Meditates" are original poems in which destiny, illicit love and the Lord's Creation are sharply revealed and scorned. Miss D'Orge has also written some delicate poems on children and an autobiographical diary. As an example of the poet's originality, here is "Stolen":

I crept slyly
to your table
. . . Oo . . . m
Sugared peaches drowned in chianti . . .

Destiny
shaped heavily like a nurse girl
yanked me by the ear
planked me in my high chair.
"There," said she,
"Eat what is set before you,
Impudence."

Oh, bread and butter
flat every-dayness
monotony
milk.

The poems of Evelyn Scott are remarkable for their incisive, almost cruel baring of the facts of existence. She has the white-hot sincerity of D. H. Lawrence, and the same probing skill in operating on the human body and spirit. Many of her poems render the sadistic power of woman over man. In "Autumn Night," the moon is a woman who caresses Love "with her contemptuous light." Her tenderness "is like the immodesty of the mad." "Her ecstasy is that of a cold and sensual child."

She is Death enjoying Life,
Innocently,
Lasciviously.

In another poem, the moon is Venus' fly trap that "swells about you," "absorbs you deliciously," "destroys you." Disease and

dissolution are everywhere: in the "agued trembling" of leaves, in the stern sepulchres of clouds, in "a mad conflagration of worlds on ardent nights." Love in any form is nothing but selfishness, diabolic absorption. The mother and her child are seen as two wills battling for mastery. Here is a terrific little scene entitled "Pietà":

> The child—
> Warm chubby thighs, fat brown arms,
> An unsurprised face—
> Cries for jam.
> The mother buys him with jam . . .
> An old woman
> Tottering on lean leather-skinned legs
> Sucks with glazing eyes
> The crystal silken milk
> That flows from the death wound
> In a young flower-soft, jewel-soft body.

In hospital, the poet sees herself as "nothing but a dull eye,"

> An eye out of a socket,
> Bursting,
> Contorted with hideous wisdom.

The truth as any one sees it is not necessarily hideous. Evelyn Scott presents her viewpoint fearlessly, relentlessly, vividly. Lola Ridge, in a sonnet "To E. S.," describes her as merciless and defenseless, and concludes that no palpitating thing "evades the cold extortion of your eye."

In contrast to these daring women, one turns to a group of varied men: Carnevali, Giovannitti, Long, Oppenheim, Davis and Sarett. The two Italians are fiery fellows, the one a bitter lyrist, the other an impassioned anarchist. Carnevali, smitten with an incurable disease, has been forced back to his home in Italy—where he lies in hospital. Giovannitti, after writing such powerful social poems as "The Walker" and "The Cage," has ceased writing. The tragic Carnevali, an enfant terrible akin to the Rimbaud he adored, was associated with the modern poetry groups in New York and Chicago. He was born in Florence in 1898. He spent eight years in America, and added

a dynamic note to our literature. The editor of his one volume, "A Hurried Man," has written: "He had a genius for intimacy and a genius for estrangement—" a stimulating fellow withal. And Sandburg has said of him: "He seemed sometimes to be throwing himself at the sun. . . . He was questing, paradoxical, singing so often the songs of the cornered rat, bitten and starved." Bitten and starved indeed, no man suffered more, or found more buoyancy in pain. His stories, poetic in themselves, are better than his poetry. "Home, Sweet Home," a tale about poverty in New York, is the most vivid thing of its kind I know of. It is a glorification of the tawdry. His poems are likewise obsessed with the commonplace: "His Majesty The Letter Carrier," "In This Hotel" (where the poet slaved as a waiter and prayed for a chance to spill hot soup over Amy Lowell), "Old Accustomed Impudent Ghost," "Utopia Of The Men Who Come Back From The War." His love poems have the flair of Italian serenades:

Until your lips be red,
Until the winter-time,
Until the money be gone,
Until God see us:
Until God see us.

Until old age come, girl,
Until the other man come,
Until the jettatura get me,
Until God see us:
Until God see us.

Because he is poor, no ceremony will clean him, "all the things soil me." "Work, milk, bread, clothes, potatoes."

Out in the hall
The gas jet
Doesn't give a damn that it is day already.
Stench
Of drenched clothes
And snore
Of married men.
Who shall ask the furnished-room poets to write
A song for the dawn?

On his return to Italy, Carnevali wrote a poem in which the once-adored America is described as "the land that gathers the rebels, the miserable, the very poor; the land of puerile and magnificent deeds."

Italy is a little family;
America is an orphan
Independent and arrogant,
Crazy and sublime,
Without tradition to guide her,
Rushing headlong in a mad run which she calls progress. . . .

I have come back, and have found you
All new and friendly, O Fatherland!
I have come back with a great burden,
With the experience of America in my head—
My head which now no longer beats the stars.
O Italy, O great shoe, do not
Kick me away again!

Arturo Giovannitti was born in the Abruzzi in 1884 and came to America in his late teens, lured by visions of the only free land on earth. Soon disillusioned by the sight of exploited labor, he dedicated his energies to pamphleteering, considered becoming a preacher, and preached in the streets instead. He became a leader of strikes and was arrested and jailed. He wrote his masterpiece, "The Walker," in solitary confinement. It is the outstanding work in his single volume, "Arrows In The Gale," 1914, and the most impassioned American tract against the prison system. It has been compared with Wilde's "Ballad Of Reading Gaol," but "The Walker" is simpler, more realistic, more potent. It is written in swinging prose paragraphs, paragraphs as insistent as the prisoner's step in the cell overhead. The poet spends his dark hours counting the recurrent beat: "the march of him who walks between the yellow brick wall and the red iron gate, thinking things that cannot be chained and cannot be locked." Measuring his space in the cell, "one-two-three-four," the man overhead also measures his death, "as the hangman measures the rope and the gravedigger the coffin." "Nothing breaks the grave rhythm of the slow, fantastic

march." When all are asleep, the poet hears three things: "the Walker, my heart and the old clock which has the soul of a fiend," since it has never tick-tocked an hour of joy. In a vision, he hears the terrible footsteps of men upon the earth, "for they either descend or climb" "to everything but Freedom and the Ideal." But none are as fearsome as the step overhead. All through the night the fellow thinks and thinks—of what? "Of a small brass key that turns just half around and throws open the red iron gate." The two hundred other prisoners think the same thought. The poet himself, who used to love "life and flowers and song and beauty and the ideal," is one with "the hired assassin, the embezzler, the forger, the counterfeiter, the incestuous, the raper, the drunkard, the prostitute, the pimp," longing for "a little key as little as my little finger." Greater than all men is the old man who carries "the mighty talisman" in his pocket, "for no other man could compel two hundred men to think for so long the same thought." He is greater than Mohammed, Arbues, Torquemada, Mesmer, "and all the other masters of other men's thoughts." "I shall call him Almighty, for he holds everything of all and of me in a little brass key in his pocket." The poet implores the Walker to stop walking: "It is wrong to walk on a grave . . . four steps from the headstone to the foot and four steps from the foot to the headstone." "Stop, rest, sleep, my brother, for the dawn is well nigh and it is not the key alone that can throw open the gate."

In Haniel Long, we come to a scholar who scorns conventions, especially the conventions of teaching. Though Long's metier as a writer lies in imaginative prose, shaded with comedy and humanism, one cannot forget a group of nineteen etchings, called "Students," printed by *The New Republic* some years ago. Among the many far-fetched attacks on American systems none have been more unfair than the wholesale diatribes against professors launched by the pedagogical Mencken. One need only consider the vital class work conducted by Robert Frost, Witter Bynner, Robert Morss Lovett, Edwin Mims, Alex-

ander Meikeljohn and others to refute such one-sided charges. Better still, an examination of the creative work produced by students under these men proves that attacks on our educational system do not hold among individuals. Some of the best of our younger writers have come out of academic circles in the hands of creative teachers. Haniel Long, stationed at Carnegie "Tech," is a man of this stamp. His epigrams render a double view of students in the eye of a teacher and the teacher in the eyes of the students. There is an exquisite balance between the two, a balance achieved through quiet raillery and self-mockery. There is the girl he is afraid to flunk because she looks like Diana; the boy who looms like the Andes—a peak nobody can teach; the girl who watches Long lest sex intervene—Long keeps the desk between them; the effusive little cherubino who is always late at classes, much though she adores them; the exotic girl who ought to come to school on an elephant and come through the window on the elephant's trunk; the haughty lady who regards Long as Mrs. Siddon regarded George the Third—"Bid me out, out, damned spot"; and the boy who dared "sit on my sacred desk and rumple my sacred hair."

> Yet he is the only one
> who ever cared to carry my books
> and call me "Maestro" in public.
> And whenever I said a clever thing
> he would exclaim, "Priceless, priceless!"

Then there is the boy who sees only the dollar sign, and "suspects me of wasting his time." And the boy who has been given a mask by parents and teachers—a common little tragedy. Finally, the teacher topples from the throne. This is how it happens:

> When our eyes meet
> I go cold to my feet.
> Some day I shall forget my necktie,
> and on that day, proud and reproachful,
> she will point her finger at me—
> and the walls of my world
> will tumble.

H. L. Davis, the Oregonian, is known only to readers of the *Poetry* magazine. Practically all of his work has appeared there; he has not collected a book. His poetry resembles Robert Frost's: it deals with outdoor life and is unfolded in natural speech wedded to a free blank verse, loose and casual. At first, one saw a good deal of his work in handsome groups; latterly, his name has disappeared. There are frequent references to pride: pride of men and women in the fields, pride of family, pride of self. And there are references to girls who have made him offers—an echo of Ezra Pound—"I half live, like a stalk, but no girl orders me." It is a pity Davis has not written more. He is the least bookish of Far-Western poets; he is not rhetorical; and aside from his kinship with Frost, he is fairly original.

> We rode hard, and brought the cattle from brushy springs,
> From heavy dying thickets, leaves wet as snow;
> From high places, white-grassed, and dry in the wind;
> Draws where the quaken-asps were yellow and white,
> And the leaves spun and spun like money spinning.
> We poured them out on the trail, and rode for town.

Lew Sarett, the Chicago poet and associate editor of *Poetry,* has made a name as a transcriber of Indian legends and "footloose adventures in the woods." A creature of the wilds, he is none the less a cultivated man who sees aborigines and frontiersmen with a civilized eye. Though there is great vigor and gusto in his Indian chants and dances, the white man peers from the background of red faces. Sarett has issued three volumes: "Many Many Moons," "The Box Of God," "Slow Smoke." He is most at home with primitive Nature, with a mystic confidence, with animals of the wilderness, brutes symbolically treated with respect to the evils of mankind. Such poems employ jaunty metres and rhymes. There is often a personal parallel, as in "To A Wild Goose Over Decoys":

> Beat on your weary flight across the blue!
> Beware, O traveller, of our gabbling geese!
> Beware this weedy counterfeit of peace!—
> Oh, I was once a passing bird like you.

"Feud" opens with a tragic picture of a "harried deer . . . broken and afraid," seeking refuge from wolves, coyotes and a hound. Presently the hunt shifts to a human metaphor. The deer are Jews tracked down by a breed "with Christ upon their lips."

> Abide with me, then, against the wolves' return,
> For I shall carry on the feud for you;
> And it shall be, to me, of small concern
> If the wolf-hearts walk on four soft feet or two.

In James Oppenheim, there is a grandiose mélange of the ancient and modern Hebrew, of the Old Testament and the polyrhythms of Whitman, of an exalted faith and the probings of psychoanalysis, of rhapsodic didacticism, messages to the world, messianic programs, cosmic ideals solemnly pronounced. An industrious dreamer and author, Oppenheim has issued several volumes of novels, stories, poetic plays, psychoanalytic studies, and eight volumes of poetry: "Monday Morning," "Songs For The New Age," "War And Laughter," "The Book Of Self," "The Solitary," "The Mystic Warrior," "Golden Bird," "The Sea" (collected poems). "Monday Morning" came out in 1909, "The Sea" in 1923. Psychoanalysis then won the poet completely: he is now a professional practitioner. Temperamentally, I cannot follow Oppenheim's exaltation for any length of time. His cosmic outpourings are unrelieved by contrast. His muse is too self-centred, and his craftsmanship an uneven, poorly controlled mechanism almost totally dependent on Isaiah, Job, David, Jeremiah, Whitman. The grand old Hebrews are profounder, simpler, more passionate, more musical, more original—and more modern. So is Walt Whitman. Sandburg found himself in the American prophet and developed along his own lines; Oppenheim has never escaped his master: his chants are echoes of the great sea chants, earth chants, human chants, cosmic chants of "Leaves Of Grass." Nor is Oppenheim an artist —this is his principal failing. Too many of his lines are frankly obvious, heavy, unpoetic; too many of his rhythms unrhythmical; too many of his speeches loquacious. Whitman's "gab"

was dynamic; he was conscious of it; even made fun of it. Oppenheim is never detached enough to make fun of anything, least of all himself and his mission. His messianic program is never beheld objectively. In a land of too many little men and too much complacency, Oppenheim's objective is wholly admirable. But the man is himself too deeply the subject of his poetry, and the subject too long drawn out. Since the style he writes in is mainly borrowed, one rarely gets at the intrinsic subject, the man apart from other men. I have no doubt that a genuine person beats behind all these lines: a man worthy of love and respect. But in spite of the continuous autobiography, the persistent search and revelation, the poems so often echo the characters of older figures, that one sees the author as their shadow. The shadow is never bloodless. It has flesh and bone, heart and spirit, body and aspiration. But it is rarely completely human in itself. The cultivated Oppenheim stands in the way of the real Oppenheim. The dithyrambs sound academic:

I come of a mighty race . . . I come of a very mighty race . . .
Adam was a mighty man, and Noah a captain of the moving waters,
Moses was a stern and splendid king, yea, so was Moses . . .
Give me more songs like David's to shake my throat to the pit of the belly,
And let me roll in the Isaiah thunder . . .

Ho! the mightiest of our young men was born under a star in the midwinter . . .
His name is written on the sun and it is frosted on the moon . . .
Earth breathes him like an eternal spring; he is a second sky over the Earth.

The year before America's entry into the World War, Oppenheim was the editorial leader of that idealistic venture, *The Seven Arts:* a forerunner of the present-day *Dial* and in most respects its superior. A splendid group of younger men, men in their twenties, were associated with the poet: Randolph Bourne, Van Wyck Brooks, Waldo Frank, Paul Rosenfeld and other American dreamers. In far-off New Hampshire, Robert Frost acted as poetry editor. *The Seven Arts* was a summing up of

tendencies of the times, and an earnest of a concentrated campaign toward a profounder cultural future. It was not so experimental as *The Little Review, Others* and *The Soil,* nor as daring esthetically. But it was sounder, more scholarly, and attained a broader catholicity. Randolph Bourne was the spiritual leader of the group. His marvelous blending of a poetic spirit with an intensely logical mind made him the prophetic force in rebellious America. He became the unconscious founder of a school of criticism of which Van Wyck Brooks and Lewis Mumford were the later leaders. With America's entry into the war, Bourne became the chief exponent of Pacifism: *The Seven Arts* group supported his clear campaign. Differences rose between the patron of the magazine and its editors. The patron, arguing that *The Seven Arts* should have no concern with politics, demanded a postponement of pacifistic propaganda. For the sake of the venture itself, Bourne was willing to submit, and won the support of the other editors, with the exception of Oppenheim. *The Seven Arts* lost its endowment and disbanded in 1917. Bourne, a cripple solely in body, died the following year of his heroic exertions in behalf of a losing cause. James Oppenheim's finest poem is the elegy on Bourne. Here are three salient passages:

In him the world's winter,
Ruined boughs and dishevelled cornfields,
And the hunchback rocks
Grey on the hills,
Passed down our streets. . . .

Bitter-sweet, and a northwest wind
To sing his requiem,
Who was
Our Age,
And who becomes
An imperishable symbol of our ongoing,
For in himself
He rose above his body and came among us
Prophetic of the race,
The great hater
Of the dark human deformity

Which is our dying world,
The great lover
Of the spirit of youth
Which is our future's seed . . .

Sung to rest in our living hearts,
We receive the rejected,
Weaving a wreath of triumph
For Randolph Bourne.

Of the three groups I have arranged somewhat arbitrarily we now come to the most important: nine poets whose work compares with the earlier work of the Imagists, and shows a greater variety of material and of esthetic forms. I shall begin with the four women, Adelaide Crapsey, Lola Ridge, Mina Loy and Marianne Moore, no two of whom resemble one another. American poetry suffered an irreparable loss in the death of Miss Crapsey in 1914. After an arduous career in teaching, her health broke down. She retired to Saranac Lake and awaited the end of her life. Overlooking the graveyard she gayly christened, Trudeau's Garden, she devoted her remaining months to the writing of verse. Hitherto, she had only written the beginning of a book on English metrics, and some fugitive pieces. The little things she wrote at Saranac have been described by her friend Claude Bragdon: "flowers of a battlefield of the spirit." The distinguished architect issued her volume of "Verse" the year after she died, and a group of her now famous "Cinquins" appeared in an early number of *Others*. In sheer perfection of artistry, no American has ever surpassed Adelaide Crapsey. Creating a stanza of her own, somewhat related to the Japanese hokku, the poet composed a series of varied poems based on the strictest five-line patterns of two, four, six, eight and two syllables. Her success was nothing less than extraordinary. Each poem is a perfect rendition of a mood, each mood a contemplative view of life in the presence of death. The language is beautifully modulated. Each stanza has a separate tonality and employs a nuance of vowels and consonants appropriate to the theme. Undertones and overtones underscore or carry on the simple syllables. Miss Crapsey wrote but a few

pages of "Cinquins": they will survive volumes and libraries of the work of louder poets. What power is here, delicacy, imagination, realism, bravery and gayety. Some of the poems are muted pianissimi; others have the strength of trombones. "Triad" and "Release" exemplify these contrasting moods and instrumentation:

> These be
> Three silent things:
> The falling snow . . . the hour
> Before the dawn . . . the mouth of one
> Just dead. . . .
>
> With swift
> Great sweep of her
> Magnificent arm my pain
> Clanged back the doors that shut my soul
> From life.

It is impossible to analyze the separate "Cinquins." One had better read and re-read them all. No single poem is grander than the little "Fate Defied." It contains the full essence of Adelaide Crapsey:

> As it
> Were tissue of silver
> I'll wear, O fate, thy grey,
> And go mistily radiant, clad
> Like the moon.

Among her remaining poems, there are perfect lyrics, "Song," "Dirge," "The Lonely Death," perfect Grecian quatrains, and the blank verse ode, "written in a moment of exasperation": "To The Dead In The Graveyard Underneath My Window."

> Oh, have you no rebellion in your bones?
> The very worms must scorn you where you lie—
> A pallid, moulding, acquiescent folk,
> Meek habitants of unresented graves.

Nor will the poet accept resignation, "sister to defeat." "I'll not be patient. I will not be still." None the less, "ironic quietude who is the despot of our days" will lay the rebel with the rest.

Better still, the poet attends to her own demise, as in "The Lonely Death":

> In the cold I will rise, I will bathe
> In waters of ice; myself
> Will shiver, and shrive myself,
> Alone in the dawn, and anoint
> Forehead and feet and hands;
> I will shutter the windows from light,
> I will place in their sockets the four
> Tall candles and set them a-flame
> In the grey of the dawn; and myself
> Will lay myself straight in my bed,
> And draw the sheet under my chin.

Lola Ridge, born in Dublin and brought up in Australia, came to these States in 1907. She has spent many years inside the frailest body on earth, so it seems, only to fight off death time and again after her many loyal friends had resigned her to the grave. Like Miss Crapsey, she is an ardent rebel—a rebel fighting life and the forces of society in behalf, not of herself, but of the brotherhood of underdogs. In the face of her own poverty, she has devoted her labor to people much better off in worldly goods and health. The trenchant spirit holding her body intact is mostly at ease in revolution, among the pitiful shapes of slums, factories and tenements, and near the head of some insurrection she endows with her communal marching. Her poetry derives its form from Whitman and the Imagists, but it lacks the musical sweep of the master and of H. D.'s concentration. Miss Ridge's is a visual rather than an aural temperament. Technically, she is surpassed by a number of inferior poets. But she excels in one difficult art: the art of using similes at appropriate moments. No poet employs them so often and with such varied success. *The New Republic* first won fame for Lola Ridge by printing her long poem, "The Ghetto," in 1918. Her first book came out a little later—probably her best book so far. "The Ghetto" volume was followed by "Sun-Up" and "Red Flag." Rumor declares that the poet is now engaged on a crucifixion epic based on the tragic lives of Sacco and Vanzetti.

"The Ghetto" opens with a challenge "To The American People":

Will you feast with me, American People?
But what have I that shall seem good to you!

On my board are bitter apples
And honey served on thorns,
And in my flagons fluid iron,
Hot from the crucibles.

How should such fare entice you!

How indeed—for here are no ladylike emotions, prettified pictures, esthetic gewgaws, but torrents of red rains and red hearts, masses of Ghetto figures, misshapen humans, Bowery drabs. "The Ghetto" and other poems on the Jew are more authentic than kindred poems by Jewish poets. Ghetto folk are seen, not self-consciously, but objectively. Similes begin at once:

The heat in Hester Street,
Heaped like a dray
With the garbage of the world.

Infants' faces "suck at the air as at empty teats." Of an old Jew, she writes:

Time spins like a crazy dial in his brain,
And night by night
I see the love-gesture of his arm
In its green-greasy coat-sleeve
Circling the Book,
And the candles gleaming starkly
On the blotched-paper whiteness of his face,
Like a miswritten psalm . . .

The portraits of patriarchs, lovers, mothers, children, are vivid throughout, as is the atmosphere of an existence won at terrific expense. Streets, push-carts, cafés, homes, the less than homes, and the observant poet in the garret of dusty things, are limned with hard, clear lines—similes ever predominant—

Strong flux of life,
Like a bitter wine
Out of the bloody stills of the world . . .
Out of the Passion Eternal.

How pitiless in exposing the wounds society has inflicted on the helpless are such poems as "Bowery Afternoon," "Faces," "Lullaby." And how exultant is the call to liberty of action, to revolution among the downtrodden:

> I love those spirits
> That men stand off and point at,
> Or shudder and hood up their souls—
> Those ruined ones,
> Where Liberty has lodged an hour
> And passed like flame,
> Bursting asunder the too small house.

"Dedication" is a song to Labor, and "The Song Of Iron" a dynamic ode to the glorious power of men at work. This is perhaps the finest poem Lola Ridge has ever written. "Frank Little At Calvary," "The Legion Of Iron" and "The Everlasting Return" belong to the same group. "Palestine" is a candid etching in which the Hebrews are challenged:

> Why should you seek a plateau walled about,
> Whose garden is the world?

Among the Nature poems, "North Wind"—"I love you, malcontent male wind—" carries on the burden of rebellion. Among the grotesques, "The Woman With Jewels" is an attack on bourgeois obesity. The rebellion of the younger against the older generation is sounded in "The Fire":

> The old men of the world have made a fire
> To warm their trembling hands.
> They poke the young men in.
> The young men burn like withes. . . .
> But the smoke of the young men's torment
> Ascends up for ever and ever.

"Sun-Up" is a quieter, mellower volume. The title poem is composed of a series of Imagistic etchings limning incidents out of an Australian infancy. The speech is authentically childlike, and the episode with Jude particularly moving. There are also some adult memoirs called "Monologues." The best poems in the book are the further songs of rebellion: "Sons Of Belial"

and "Reveille." "Reveille" contains poems to Emma Goldman, Alexander Berkman, Jim Larkin, and the inimitable—

To-day
little French merchant men
with pointed beards
and fat American merchant men
without any beards
drive to a feast of buttered squabs.
The band . . . accoutered and neatly caparisoned . . .
plays the Marsellaise. . . .
And I think of a wild stallion . . . newly caught . . .
flanks yet taut and nostrils spread
to the smell of a racing mare,
hitched to a grocer's cart.

"Red Flag," issued two years ago, has a double interest: the entrance of Communist Russia on the one hand and of traditional sonnets on the other. Much has been written on the reversion to old forms on the part of radical poets. The jubilant Untermeyer dashed off an article on the return of the "Vers Libertine" and picked on the present author as the most flagrant of reactionaries. This is not the place for more than a brief rebuttal. I can only say that my own experiments with old forms were not prompted by compromise, but by a spirit of further adventuring among poetic forms, old or new, susceptible of development along personal lines. I had learned through slow stages that a man can express an experience in any form, and that no form is more severe in its demands and more difficult to master than free verse. In other words, there is no such thing as free verse. A man did not go to the sonnet merely for discipline. He had already had continuous discipline in finding the exact form for each emotion, thought or adventure. Nor did the man I have in mind weary of free forms in the lyric, the ballad, the narrative, the drama. He wished to add to his work the further instrumentation of classic models handled with reference to a fresh experience. I drag this confession in here because Lola Ridge, and others among old comrades, grieved about my apostasy. Several even sent me to Coventry—only to join me there later. One fell between the camps of

conservatism and radicalism and was rejected by both: a deeply helpful dénouement. A group is the natural haven of any young author, especially if the group contain different personalities. Ultimately, he must face life and art alone and go his own way. The sonnets of Miss Ridge are not the equal of her poems in free verse. None the less, despite an awkward handling of metrics, her spirit pervades each poem. Of the Russian poems, "Snow-Dance For The Dead," is a delicate elegy in which children are invited to undulate like the snow and to "dance beneath the Kremlin towers" for soldiers fallen in the Red Revolution. If Lola Ridge should ever die, Russia ought to honor her at the side of Jack Reed. So should Ireland, Australia, America, and every other land in whose heart freedom is more than a worn-out word.

During the war, another curious woman, exotic and beautiful, came to New York from foreign shores: the English Jewess, Mina Loy. Visiting the shrines of modern art and literature in Paris and Florence, and being accepted as a coeval in the maddest circles, Miss Loy, who is an artist as well as poet, imbibed the precepts of Apollinaire and Marinnetti and became a Futurist with all the earnestness and irony of a woman possessed and obsessed with the sum of human experience and disillusion. Her first poems appeared in Alfred Stieglitz's *Camera Work,* along with some of the earliest work of Gertrude Stein. Most of Mina Loy's later work, including a whole issue of her "Songs To Joannes," appeared in *Others,* and created a violent sensation. She has never published a book. Though *Others* was a private publication with a circulation of only a few hundred copies, the first number was hailed with public derision: it contained some of Miss Loy's "Love Songs." In an unsophisticated land, such sophistry, clinical frankness, sardonic conclusions, wedded to a madly elliptical style scornful of the regulation grammar, syntax and punctuation (page E. E. Cummings), horrified our gentry and drove our critics into furious despair. The nudity of emotion and thought roused the worst disturbance, and the utter nonchalance in revealing the secrets of sex was denounced as nothing less than lewd. It took a strong di-

gestive apparatus to read Mina Loy. Unhappily for her, the average critic had been fed on treacle and soda water over too long a Puritanical term in the jails of our daily papers. I remember how some of the reviews puzzled, rather than injured her. She wondered what sort of a land she had come to and, wondering no longer, returned to the mountains and lakes of Italy. Here are the lines which opened the overture and released the pens of Billingsgate:

> Spawn of fantasies
> Sitting the appraisable
> Pig Cupid his rosy snout
> Rooting erotic garbage . . .

To reduce eroticism to the sty was an outrage, and to do so without verbs, sentence structure, punctuation, even more offensive. And yet, behind the abnormally scornful style, the careful reader, reading many times, might have detected genuine emotions, feelings inspired by "something the shape of a man" whose "skin-sack" packed "all the completions of my infructuous impulses" and whose hair is "a God's door-mat" on the threshold of the mind. We, here in enlightened Manhattan, were simply unaccustomed to such passionate, clinical writing:

> We might have coupled
> In the bed-ridden monopoly of a moment
> Or broken flesh with one another
> At the profane communion table
> Where wine is spilled on promiscuous lips
>
> We might have given birth to a butterfly
> With the daily news
> Printed in blood on its wings.

Certain sacrilegious references to the love of the Holy Trinity, as compared with the love of manhood and womanhood sweeping the brood clean out, were too strong even for nonconformists. Had a man written these poems, the town might have viewed them with comparative comfort. But a woman wrote them, a woman who dressed like a lady and painted charming lamp-shades. It is difficult to appraise the work of Mina Loy

in perspective. Though she was original, a number of eccentricities, some of which are conscious distortions of style, hamper one's full admiration. I am certain, in reviewing the glamorous years of the poetic civil war, that a few of her best poems will survive what I used to consider the still better poems of other members of the group. Some of my old enthusiasms have cooled in perspective, whereas doubts I held concerning Miss Loy have vanished. Though I printed the work she gave me almost in toto, much of it puzzled me at the time. I felt that she might have made a greater effort to communicate herself more clearly. She did not have to compromise with the reader, but with a stricter artistic conscience. If some of her work still looks haphazard, the best of it remains provocative and wears well in the proverbial test of time.

If it is difficult to appraise Mina Loy, the difficulties are twofold with respect to Marianne Moore, who was born, not in St. Louis, not in America, but somewhere out of the average world. The more one views our poetry the more one is impressed with its diversity of surprises. Even after astonishment has been mastered and one is prepared for any future contingency, there is no accounting for Miss Moore. Here is a poet the wildest imagination had not bargained for; and a steady acquaintance with her work over a long period does not reduce its novelty. She is a graduate of Bryn Mawr, where she met her lifelong friend, H. D., a friendship which ultimately led to the publication of Miss Moore's first poems in *The Egoist* and of her first volume by The Egoist Press. The volume was brought out without the poet's knowledge, an act instigated by her abnormal modesty toward her own work. Miss Moore taught stenography at the Carlisle Indian School, came to New York about fifteen years ago, and held the post of assistant librarian in the Hudson Park Branch for a number of years. She received *The Dial* Award for 1924, and The Dial Press brought out an American edition of her "Poems," now entitled "Observations." An amazing glossary was added to this edition. Presently, Miss Moore was offered the editorship of *The Dial*, a position she has

graced ever since. I remember how delighted her old friends were with her sudden rise out of obscurity to the leadership of the most distinguished of our literary monthlies. For myself, the delight has begun to wear off. Since the publication of "Observations," Miss Moore has written little or no poetry. She has sacrificed her energies to the task of editing *The Dial*, and not even *The Dial* is worth so great a sacrifice. Emerson left the old *Dial* after two years of bountiful service. Other poet-pioneers who have edited magazines—Poe, Bryant, Whittier, Lowell, etc.—usually returned to their first love or embarked on other pioneer ventures. *The Dial* is an established enterprise which does not need Marianne Moore as much as poetry needs her. It is possible that she, like Wallace Stevens and a number of other originals, is a one-book-poet. In any event, "Observations" is one of the most unique contributions ever made to American literature. It has indeed no parallel in any literature.

Though Miss Moore is a Brobdingnagian reader of other literatures, and of the remotest documents conceivable, and though she has frankly quoted in the body of her poems phrases and lines from every source, one cannot say that her poetry is a borrowed art. Her glossary indicates that she has read and digested poets, philosophers, scientists, essayists, critics, historians, playwrights, diaries, letters, newspapers, trade papers, advertisements, text books, comic papers, and what not, and also indicates that she has listened to conversations, disputes, colloquies and monologues. But the glossary does not show how clearly the poet's temperament has observed life itself. Her records may have been made in privacy, much as Jane Austen wrote about society underneath her workbasket; but they are instinct with the findings of a consciousness alert to the people, beasts and things of this planet. Nor is her style a mere literary style salted with apt quotations. I have to testify that her talk is as closely related to her writing as her writing is to her talk. Her writing is an extension of the art of conversation, an art in which she has few peers. Just as her speech is supported by

extemporaneous bits plucked out of memory with astounding ease, so her written speech seems most natural when it relies on occasional quotations apropos to the matter in hand. I drag in this personal note solely by way of disproving the contention of certain critics that Miss Moore's style is affected. A third consideration requires more extended comment: the designs of her poems on paper. Where some modern poets have endeavored to approximate music in their notations, this poet has endeavored to give each poem an extra pictorial appeal—a method which also appears in the later Cummings. Miss Moore's designs, always a delight to the eye, are a further indication of the preoccupation of radical poets with extrinsic forms based on intrinsic experiences. There is nothing haphazard in this poet's effects. They are carefully conceived and set down. Furthermore, though her lines have the movement of long sentences, rarely interrupted by emotional intensities, they are broken by rhymes lending a fairly regular beat to the undulating prose. The rhyme scheme, never the same in two poems, is quite extraordinary. Now and then, polysyllables are divided at the end of a line for the sake of the design or the rhyme. The poem called "Peter" is an example of this unusual device.

Miss Moore writes English of a high order. But it is neither British nor Tory. It meets the language on a lofty ground and transplants and applies it to things American with consummate wit and intelligence. The rich vocabulary is enriched with apt colloquialisms. Though Miss Moore cherishes or derides commonplace things, her style is never commonplace. She is an aristocrat difficult for democrats to read, and caviar to most poets themselves. Poets, as well as critics, can find no poetry here; nor does the author demand that her book be called poetry. She has named it "Observations." There is nothing to be gained by arguing the point. I am certain of this: whether her book is poetry, prose or prose-poetry, it is a work of art. We waste too much time trying to classify poets. So few of our poets are artists, we ought to be grateful for the few. People complain of Miss Moore because of the prevalence of intelligence over the emotions. Passionate intensity is totally absent. One

goes to other poets for the fire and brimstone of the heart. Miss Moore's heart is by no means extinct. It has always been under the control of a mind devoted to the impersonal, to reasoning and logic, to beauty evolved in cool detachment. To include her as a poet, one has to change one's definitions of poetry. I prefer to accept her as she is. I find it impossible to discuss her work in detail. Such discussion requires quotation. Miss Moore's designs are so intricate as to discourage emasculation. They contain ideas and observations on nearly everything under the sun, with the possible exception of love. Marriage does not escape satire, a satire worthy of Henry James. Wit is all too rare in America. So is wisdom. If wit and wisdom are outside the province of poetry, poetry is a limited art. I have a notion that poetry should contain the sum of human experience. Marianne Moore has confined herself to a single set of experiences. Possibly this is all she has had to say, and she will say no more. But her book is valuable and could have been written by no other person, past or present. I should like to quote about twenty poems marked for quotation—especially those concerning animals, America and the sea, and those in which literary criticism is arranged in poetic designs. The poem called "Poetry" is typical of the last group. But I prefer to quote a delightful defense of American culture:

ENGLAND

With its baby rivers and little towns, each with its abbey or its cathedral,
with voices—one voice perhaps, echoing through the transept—the criterion of suitability and convenience: and Italy with its equal
shores—contriving an epicureanism from which the grossness has been

extracted: and Greece with its goats and its gourds, the nest of modified illusions:
and France, the "chrysalis of the nocturnal butterfly" in
whose products, mystery of construction diverts one from what was originally one's
object—substance at the core: and the East with its snails, its emotional

shorthand and jade cockroaches, its rock crystal and its imperturbability,
all of museum quality: and America where there
is the little old ramshackle victoria in the south, where cigars are smoked on the
street in the north; where there are no proof readers, no silkworms, no digressions;

the wild man's land; grass-less, links-less, language-less country in which letters are written
not in Spanish, not in Greek, not in Latin, not in shorthand
but in plain American which cats and dogs can read! The letter "a" in psalm and calm when
pronounced with the sound of "a" in candle, is very noticeable but

why should continents of misapprehension have to be accounted for by the
fact? Does it follow that because there are poisonous toadstools
which resemble mushrooms, both are dangerous? In the case of mettlesomeness which may be
mistaken for appetite, of heat which may appear to be haste, no con-

clusions may be drawn. To have misapprehended the matter, is to have confessed
that one has not looked far enough. The sublimated wisdom
of China, Egyptian discernment, the cataclysmic torrent of emotion compressed
in the verbs of the Hebrew language, the books of the man who is able

to say, "I envy nobody but him and him only, who catches more fish than
I do,"—the flower and fruit of all that noted superiority—should one not have stumbled upon it in America, must one imagine
that it is not there? It has never been confined to one locality.

Maxwell Bodenheim is another esthetic poet difficult to decipher. In his case, the lack of complete communication with the reader is based upon a violent contempt of all readers: the eccentric Max is the misanthrope among us. If there is anyone or anything he has not hated so far, hatred will come soon enough and bury the man or object under another sardonic oath. Bodenheim, born in Natchez, Miss., came into prom-

inence fairly early, and the hostility of editors and critics served him well. The very rejections by magazines over a period of four years gave him a measure of notoriety no amount of praise could have duplicated. When he came to New York, via Chicago, at the age of twenty-two, and housed himself with the editor of *Others,* his work was already known and admired along the Atlantic seaboard, and its author a legendary figure. During the next fifteen years, the legend grew to such proportions that I have actually been asked whether such a person as Bodenheim exists. The Bodenheim legend is the most fascinating aspect of this enigmatic dreamer; and the man who writes his biography will do well to examine the myriad tales, true and untrue, the poet has gathered about him. Nor has the poet discounted or discouraged the legendry. In the midst of his hatreds, his attacks on enemies, his repeated challenges to critics, Bodenheim is a brilliant tactician and publicist. Scorning the public, he has never lost an opportunity to woo it with shellfire. His appetite for fame at the hands of a country he despises is as sardonic as his most sardonic poem. Latterly, after a long, heart-rending battle with poverty, the poet has won material success through the writing of a swift series of short novels notable for their salacity. Always a prolific writer of poems, plays and essays, the novelist has succeeded where the artist failed. An artist wrote the poems, plays and essays; an economic opportunist wrote the novels.

Since 1918, Bodenheim has issued seven volumes of poetry: "Minna And Myself," "Advice," "Introducing Irony," "Against This Age," "The Sardonic Arm," "Returning To Emotion," "The King Of Spain." Though the opening volume owed a good deal to Imagism, it contained such moving poems as the Minna group, "Poet To His Love," "Death," "Hill-Side Tree," "Cotton-Picker," "Old Age," "To Our Dead," "To A Discarded Steel Rail," "Rear Porches Of An Apartment Building." A romantic tone touches realistic things with a language singularly rich. Metaphors and similes are modeled without straining after effect—the bane of the older, more self-centred Bodenheim. The poet had not yet begun to hate life and its

people. Though irony is here, it is not the outcome of an inverted romanticism, of disappointed illusions. The book is full of fine single lines—the test of any fine poet. "The gown you wear is curiously like sound." "Your body is a closed fan." "Afternoon sunlight limps tenuously away." "Pain is a country cousin of yours." "The dust of many roads has been my grey wine." A discarded steel rail is described as "a smile which men call rust." The faces of dead soldiers "form a gravely mocking sentence." The sky over tenements is "a sky that has never known sun, moon, or stars." "The death of the afternoon . . . is but the lengthening of blue-black shadows on brick walls." And here is Death in three lines:

> A fan of smoke in the long, green-white revery of the sky,
> Slowly curls apart.
> So shall we rise and widen out in the silence of air.

When Death comes for the poet,

> Then he will graze me with his hands
> And I shall be one of the sleeping, silver birds
> Between the cold waves of his hair, as he tip-toes on.

In "Advice," Bodenheim's scorn and derision of humanity enters. A number of the images and melodies have rare beauty. But the Bodenheim manner, as Untermeyer indicates, has become a mannerism: "There is scarcely a phrase that is not tricked out with more ornaments and associations than it can bear; while poems sink beneath the weight of profuse decorations." Brilliant fantasies are carried to the last extreme and beyond. The adoration of adjectives and adverbs is often confusing to the reader for whom the poet has no regard. But such things as "Advice To A Blue-Bird" are superb. Here are the first four and last four lines:

> Who can make a delicate adventure
> Of walking on the ground?
> Who can make grass-blades
> Arcades for pertly careless straying?
>
> Mincing, wanton blue-bird,
> Grimace at the hoofs of passing men.

You alone can lose yourself
Within a sky, and rob it of its blue!

Each of the "Advice" poems closes with a characteristic moral.

"Introducing Irony," "Against This Age," and "The Sardonic Arm" were published in rapid succession. Forewords have put in an appearance, and none is more gorgeous than the "Reluctant Foreword" to "The Sardonic Arm." What an introductory sentence: "If I yield to the remorseful redundancy of a foreword, with its bedraggled battalions of fiercely insinuating words, it is from no mere desire to invite the ridicule of impatient time, or to rail against that host of vacant insincerities which betrays the animations of life." This is absolute Bodenheim; no one else could have written it. It is a clue to the escapist philosophy of the romanticist who composes his own esthetic in the tower of solitude. "It may be that I regard words as flexible lures seducing the essential emptiness of life, with little, false promises . . . haloes and bludgeons with which a void may attain the image of toiling or dancing importance." This line was written by a man versed in human relations; he has not escaped people, but wooed them, and they have loved and admired him in turn. How he derides his fellow poets—each of us has felt the lash. "The poetic situation in America is, indeed, a blustering and verbose invitation to boredom and a slight, reviling headache." Our poets are window-cleaners, "milkmen depositing bottles on doorsteps and acquiring dignity in the process," sex hounds, chorus-girls, farm-hands, factory-owners, business men—everything, in short, but poets. Bodenheim makes a plea for several neglected aristocrats: "Intellect," "Delicate Fantasy," "Irony." "The American spectacle has aroused a mood; words conceal the essential helplessness; and the lurking emptiness behind life separates into little, curious divisions of sound." The poet proceeds to make the divisions. Curiously, not everyone has been out of sympathy with Bodenheim's attitude. If he ever admitted or had to admit that anyone agreed with him, he would lose his most cherished illusion: the world has no use for him. The Bodenheim legend

would vanish in air, and the actor lose his favorite rôle. I sincerely hope he never loses it: where would we be without our Mississippi Hamlet?

On the technical side, Bodenheim's entrance into rhyming, into intellectual quatrains via T. S. Eliot, into couplets and sonnets, is of further interest in disclosing the effort of radical poets to bend old forms to new devices. "Short Story In Sonnet Form" is Bodenheimesque in its language, the horror of its melodrama, the graphic power of its conclusion. He has set a newspaper murder-story to poetry of his own. The hatred of mankind reaches its height in "The Sardonic Arm." This volume and its two companion volumes often defeat their own ends by a snarling, verbose rhetoric so completely unreal as to defy acceptance even on the part of the poet's admirers. The eccentricity has grown too familiar. We take it for granted after the first few lines and pass on to lesser known poets and search for the novelty which is no longer novel with Bodenheim.

The title, "Returning To Emotion," was inspired by another battle with the critics. In a shorter foreword, "Candidly Speaking," he confesses he is returning to the mood of his two earliest volumes, and declares: "Words are selected and combined *only in the mind,* and spoken or written emotion must be a blending of animal feeling and conscious thought." The preface concludes with a challenge to critics named in detail, with Mencken at the head. Amusing notes underscore some of the poems: "This poem had the honor of being rejected by *The Dial.*" "The King Of Spain" does away with preludes and adds to the notes. There are attacks on Babette Deutsch, Mencken, Harriet Monroe, *The Nation.* The American habit of giving prizes to some and honorable mention to others—the latter a truly detestable formula—is scored by the author. A climax is struck in the note: "This poem did not receive an honorable mention in any of the Poetry Prize Contests staged in this country. Why? Because the poem remained in the desk of its author!" The poems in the manner of the earliest books do not measure up with the past. Of greater interest are the excursions into contemporary moods and modes: poems in jazz rhythms, intellec-

tual songs on girls of the street, polysyllabic rhyme-schemes via Eliot, metaphysical poems via Elinor Wylie and the present generation. The veteran of thirty-seven is not to be outdistanced or buried by younger poets. He can meet them on their own ground, study their methods and make them his own:

> For Christian, pagan, scientist, and fool,
> Console themselves with measurements and walls,
> Without allowing fantasy and thought
> To roam unfrightened past the vast, black halls . . .

"Here Is Your Realism" is a stunning satire on realistic methods of telling a murder-story. As to the assassin—

> He sits now in a vapid rooming-house
> And spies a form upon the empty bed.
> One spot of dread moves slowly on his head,
> Like some invisible, resistless louse.

The poems in blank verse are equally successful. It is possible that Bodenheim, despising realism, has found his metier in satiric realism. No man is more acquainted with slums and with the process of society in shoving outcasts deeper in the mire. Bodenheim has the right touch for blasting injustice, and he would serve himself better by turning his weapons away from ephemeral critics and training them on the eternal evils and vices infesting the human race. He need not love the race in order to do this. Nor need he fall in love with his native land. The land can use some more honest haters of Bodenheim's stamp. All one asks is that the antipathy rise out of the picayune class and devote itself to the largest issues. Bodenheim falls short of Swift and Rabelais by virtue of their more universal concern with the pretensions and hypocrisies of the race. And the Irishman and Frenchman did a jolly job while they were at it. Though Bodenheim writes about gaiety, I never feel gay in his presence. But I prefer to let him write his own epitaph:

> The stone that squats above his head—
> Innocuous, revered, complete—
> Should leave this rebel-poet's bed.
> They threw so many—why repeat?

In Wallace Stevens, we come to another esthete, the hedonist par excellence of modern poetry. If he has written poetry for its own sake, it is not because, like Bodenheim, he hates life and embraces an escapist philosophy. No one enjoys life more and makes a richer festival of his pleasure. Unlike the eccentric Max and like Marianne Moore, the Hartford lawyer is contemptuous of worldly popularity. For a number of years, his poems appeared in *Rogue, Poetry, Others, The Little Review,* etc., but not until 1923 did his volume, "Harmonium," emerge. For years his friends had begged him to publish a book, and Stevens, bored with being the sole poet who had refused to publish a book, permitted Carl Van Vechten to cajole Alfred Knopf into printing "Harmonium." Comparatively few copies were sold; the rest were remaindered. The volume contains the whole of Stevens' life-work with the exception of the exquisite plays: "Three Travellers Watch A Sunrise" and "Carlos Among The Candles." Formerly, it was impossible to get him to publish a book; now it is impossible to get him to publish a poem. Write him, wire him or visit him, one always receives the same answer: he has written nothing for years. One reverts to the reading of duller poets and waits in vain for the fist of the Connecticut giant to scratch off another perfect etching. But even the perfect letters, as minute and undecipherable as those of Robinson, have ceased coming to town. Continued self-deprecation has finally removed the man from the scene in which he had always refused to participate. He wrote purely for the pleasure of writing, as he has lived for the pleasure of living.

Gorham B. Munson has dubbed Stevens the dandy of poetry. Llewelyn Powys declares that it is "beyond good and evil, beyond hope and despair, beyond thought of any kind, one might almost say." Untermeyer avows it is "little related to any human struggle"; it "progresses toward a sort of absolute poetry which, depending on tone and color rather than on passion, aims to flower in the air of pure estheticism." These three critics are superficially correct. Stevens is more than a dandy,

a designer, an esthete. Each of these persons is a phase of a central person, each a mask in a masquerade at the heart of which philosophy and tragi-comedy view the world with serenity. If the earth is a tawdry sphere, America a tawdry land, the relation of human to human the most tawdry of all, Stevens refuses to despair. Nor does he satirize the situation. He may seem superior to his surroundings; one may suspect him even of snobbery. But he is neither a misanthrope nor a snob, but one of the wisest and subtlest of natives: an American reared on French Symbolism, on the philosophic poetry of the aristocratic Jules Laforgue. Not to mention an older race: the aristocratic Elizabethans. Again we are in the presence of an enigma. Here is a cultivated man in the midst of the American mob, shrugging his shoulders at Mammon and indifferent to fame; a man of affairs lolling in railroad coaches en route to Florida, eating and drinking like a sybarite—and jotting down a note or two. But what notes these are. They are among the perfect things in any literature: perfect in sensation, color and sound, versification, whether in old or new forms; perfect in language, the relation of phrase to phrase, vowel to vowel, consonant to consonant. Emotion has achieved its thought, thought its system, system its poetry: a poetry now clear, now vague, as clear and vague as life. Behind the veils, there is always a meaning, though the poet employs supersubtlety for veiling the meaning as well. No one hates the obvious more. No one knows better than he that all these things have been felt and thought and known before. One can only improvise on material used over and over again, and improvise for oneself alone. Here is no question of pleasing anybody. Here is no question of pleasing even the ego. The man is a little weary of insurance cases, clients and courts, opposing lawyers and judges. He decides on a short vacation, not among friends and not among Parisians, but among the Carolinas, or better still, down in Ponce de Leon's Florida. In between delectable meals and wines, if wines there be, one gets rid of the itch of thinking. If some editorial friend is idiotic

enough to demand these notes, let him have them, and the less said the better. But enough of such nonsense, no more nonsense henceforth.

As with Marianne Moore, it is unfair to quote parts of Stevens' poems. They are complete from the first to the last syllable. As a composer of titles, Stevens has no equal in this country. I have quoted the titles of the plays; here are the names of poems: "Invective Against Swans," "The Paltry Nude Starts On A Spring Voyage," "Domination Of Black," "Le Monocle De Mon Oncle," "Fabliau Of Florida," "The Worms At Heaven's Gate," "The Emperor Of Ice-Cream" (who is Death),"To The One Of Fictive Music," "Peter Quince At The Clavier," "Thirteen Ways Of Looking At A Blackbird." "Domination Of Black" develops its theme through a beautifully varied repetition—a method Sandburg owes to Stevens. "The Snow Man," employing the same musical device, unfolds the suggestion that man's mind should wear snow properly to evaluate winter and death, since he who is "nothing himself" beholds "nothing that is not there and the nothing that is." "Le Monocle De Mon Oncle," a series of twelve poems in eleven lines each, is a marvelous group of love poems—though love is barely mentioned—singing the "faith of forty" against decay. The language is magnificent, orotund, Elizabethan.

> Is it for nothing, then, that old Chinese
> Sat tittivating by their mountain pools
> Or in the Yangste studied out their beards?
> I shall not play the flat historic scale.
> You know how Utamaro's beauties sought
> The end of love in their all-speaking braids.
> You know the mountainous coiffures of Bath.
> Alas! Have all the barbers lived in vain
> That not one curl in nature has survived?
> Why, without pity on these studious ghosts,
> Do you come dripping in your hair from sleep?

The whole series is in the grand manner. If I have read this group once, I have read it dozens of times and found more and more in the reading. To the yearning national question, where is our next major poet to come from, I always feel like respond-

ing: Out of Wallace Stevens, if Stevens would let him come. But the exasperating fellow sticks to his laws and lawyers. It is not that the banality of existence is too much for him. He has done magic things with banalities, tuned them to huge enjoyments. If this man wrote a poem about Main Street, that universal locale, without losing its identity, would become transformed into the only Nirvana worth sighing for. It is what he does to things that makes them memorable. Simply by being himself, and viewing things through his temperament, gorgeous poems evolve. He may be fantastic and grotesque on the surface, a lover of nonsense and alliterative games; but a deep imagination directs his observation. And what an ear he has for orchestral language. If one cannot understand his poems, there is always the orchestration, as in "Sunday Morning," "The Comedian As The Letter C," "To The One Of Fictive Music," and many others. "Sunday Morning," though obscure, is a great poem. The following lines were not written by a dandy, a designer, an esthete:

> Jove in the clouds had his inhuman birth.
> No mother suckled him, no sweet land gave
> Large-mannered motions to his mythy mind.
> He moved among us, as a muttering king,
> Magnificent, would move among his hinds,
> Until our blood, commingling, virginal,
> With heaven, brought such requital to desire
> The very hinds discerned it, in a star.
> Shall our blood fail? Or shall it come to be
> The blood of paradise? And shall the earth
> Seem all of paradise that we shall know?
> The sky will be much friendlier then than now,
> A part of labor and a part of pain,
> And next in glory to enduring love,
> Not this dividing and indifferent blue.

I wish there were space to quote a number of the shorter poems, each so different in mood and language: the poem in which "rationalists, wearing square hats . . . in square rooms" are advised to wear sombreros; the exquisite Chinese bits about the blackbird; the haunting lyrics on death, on nonentity. I wish

there were room to quote the whole of Peter Quince (the only fairly well-known poem), with its subtle change of movements; or the delicious doggerel concerning Vincentine; or the metaphysical poems written by an ironist aware of the nonsense inherent in any one system of thought. Or the "Nomad Exquisite," the only frank self-portrait; or the many downright comedies; or the poem on Fictive Music—another poem in the grand manner. The wish is genuinely poignant in view of the fact that "Harmonium" is out of print and inaccessible to the average reader. Nor will the author make the slightest effort to revive and reprint it. Here is an early lyric. The human described in the poem is not Wallace Stevens. But the last line is.

> This is how the wind shifts:
> Like the thoughts of an old human,
> Who still thinks eagerly
> And despairingly.
> The wind shifts like this:
> Like a human without illusions,
> Who still feels irrational things within her.
> The wind shifts like this:
> Like humans approaching proudly,
> Like humans approaching angrily.
> This is how the wind shifts:
> Like a human, heavy and heavy,
> Who does not care.

The career of William Carlos Williams, the Rutherford poet, has been decidedly interesting. Born in the unpicturesque Jersey town in which he has practiced medicine for the past twenty years, Williams is the most indigenous of modern American poets. Despite a good deal of traveling in youth and the further traveling of recent years, he has remained loyal to his home town and its environs. Contrary to his lifelong friend, Ezra Pound, the leading crusader against America, Williams, after a short sojourn with the Imagists (vide his first volume, "The Tempers," published in London), struck out for himself, turned his keen eye and nose to things just around him, attuned his ear to these sensations and achieved, in mad flights and slow steps, a

poetic style peculiarly his own. Positive that anything real was material for poetry and determined to rid himself of all influences, Williams has fought a continuous battle—with himself most of all. The battle with himself has finally gotten the upper hand. Of late years, his work, turning more and more to prose and poetic prose, has included in the body of its realistic fiction a parallel set of theories fascinating in themselves, but completely out of place in a work of art. I know of nothing more annoying than these persistent interruptions to the powerful pulse of Williams' fictions, since the theories are a defense mechanism whereby the poet, scorning an audience as numskulls, vilifies that audience for refusing to doff a larger hat to him. The paradox is similar to Bodenheim's. In the midst of his intensity and vivid utterance, Williams lacks confidence in himself, a confidence other poets feel for him. Behind his bragging and public swearing, wretched uncertainty has him in thrall and knifes the poet mid-air in a glorious flight. Some years ago, H. D., another old friend, warned Williams against his self-castigation (vide "Kora In Hell"): "It is as if you were *ashamed* of your Spirit, ashamed of your inspiration! —as if you mocked at your own song. It's very well to *mock* at yourself—it is a spiritual sin to mock at your inspiration." I have often wondered how much of Williams' nudity of style, a nudity unparalleled hitherto, is the result of his hatred of shame and cowardice. His great frankness has been the inspiration of the younger poets of the left wing; he has become their leader in the face of his steady unpopularity with critics and the public. His concern with these latter has become an interest out of proportion with what they deserve—an echo of Pound. The medico has a genius in certain fields, and dilutes it with theories, wailing about neglect, condemnations of inferior writers, upbraidings of America, etc. Notwithstanding a love of life down to the most minute detail, a cultural equipment of no mean power, an instinct for scientific reasoning, a knowledge of the neglect paid to original artists in the past, Williams falls off Pegasus, jumps onto a Rutherford soapbox and harangues his friends and imaginary enemies. It is a pity the

orations are so frenzied and so fine. They are often poems in themselves. Personally, I prefer the poet of "Al Que Quierre," 1917. Here the poet was content to offer the book "to him who wants it." No publisher wanted it and few critics and ordinary people read it. But it won the affection of poets by virtue of its absolute freshness and American artistry. Williams' third volume of poems, "Sour Grapes," 1922, is not so good. It was dedicated to the author of "Mushrooms" after certain technical differences had estranged two old comrades. If I return to the Williams of the *Others* days, it is not because of personal reasons or matters of sentiment, but because "Al Que Quiere" is an even finer volume now than it was twelve years ago. It was then and still is one of the most distinguished contributions to an era in which distinction of one sort or another had almost become the rule.

Rutherford, New Jersey, is at the heart of this book, and Rutherford is its universe. Emerson, Thoreau, Dickinson, found the world at the house doors of Concord, Walden, Amherst—beautiful places in themselves. Superficially, Rutherford is comparatively ugly. It took a poet to reveal its inner beauty, and he found that beauty in things which the rest of the world passes by with its nose in the air. In the sensory organs of Williams, the dirtiest and tawdriest things are beautiful, and disease no less attractive than health. As a doctor he handles disease with clean hands. Ultimate physical degeneration is present in every outgoing breath of the body. The physician holds the pulse of the patient and the poet the pulse of the physician. The two men in one work side by side and, in between cases and calls at all hours of the day and night, sit down to a poem together. They resemble the Russian Chekhov, doctor and fictionist, who felt such ironic tenderness for inconsequential things and people. The inconsequential are the heroes of "Al Que Quiere," and the author is a member of the brotherhood of townspeople. He is always addressing them, and might well have called the book, "My Townspeople." How truer to the deeper aspects of human contact this book is than the colossally popular "Main Street." Nothing escapes Sinclair Lewis

except the human heart, his own included. The heart, carefully tested by the brain, is at the core of "Al Que Quiere." It is not a democratic book, based on Christian theories and utopias. People and things are what they are, and one tries to transcribe them as such. Sympathy and understanding, inspiration and science, sit down to the task in moments of tranquillity. Another poem is the outcome.

The poet looks about for other poets to join him, but not one has "the earthy tastes I require." So he goes about his quest alone—no poet more lonely. If he walks back streets and improves upon the houses of the poor by painting his own "a bluish green,"

No one
will believe this
of vast import to the nation.

It were "far more profitable" to live in the great world beyond, to follow the gulls moving "seaward very quietly." But the native is true to his people, though their hymn tunes outrage his taste. "The beauty of the terrible faces of our nonentities" stirs him to a poem. The set pieces of leading citizens stir him too—"but not in the same way."

The little sparrows
hop ingenuously
about the pavement
quarreling
with sharp voices
over those things
that interest them.
But we who are wiser
shut ourselves in
on either hand
and no one knows
whether we think good
or evil.
Meanwhile,
the old man who goes about
gathering dog-lime
walks in the gutter
without looking up

and his tread
is more majestic than
that of the Episcopal minister
approaching the pulpit
of a Sunday.
These things
astonish me beyond words.

The tract on how to perform a funeral is a grand and humorous affair. Outside of a few goddams and such, profanities borrowed from Pound, "Tract" is utterly irresistible: all small-town funerals henceforth should be conducted in accordance with the Williams program. The poet asks a "wanderer moon smiling a faintly ironical smile" where he would be carried "if I should buy a shirt your color and put on a neck tie sky blue." Doubtless to an American penitentiary or insane asylum. Or if he dances naked and grotesque before his mirror, the while his wife and the world are asleep, and sings softly—"I am lonely, lonely, I was born to be lonely, I am best so—"

who shall say I am not
the happy genius of my household?

Only the censor of public morality.

The apostrophe to the medico's "strong ridged and deeply hollowed nose" accounts for his "tactless" interest for the very smells of life, the "rank odor of a passing springtime!" No one is more deeply sensitive to the American spring; he is indeed the spring poet among the radicals, the buoyant responder to the first shoots of March. "Spring Strains" is a wildly exciting adventure with trees, buds and birds at the time of the most intense desire. The poem is true to the tenets of Imagism: sex is never mentioned; it is handled symbolically. But the rushing images are among the most impassioned in our language. Even Walt seems slow by comparison. And there is no attempt to shock the bourgeoisie. The pæan is purity itself. "Portrait Of A Woman In Bed," in another genre, is quite as astonishing. She is being doctored by Williams and talks at a violent rate. Charity has tried to care for her, but she has thrust it out.

Try to help me
if you want trouble
or leave me alone—
that ends trouble.

The county physician
is a damned fool
and you
can go to hell!

You could have closed the door
when you came in;
do it when you go out.
I'm tired.

This is slamming the door on the conventions of writing poetry. There are other portraits remarkable for their clean directness: "the murderer's little daughter" who has chosen Williams "for the knife that darts along her smile"; "The Ogre," another adolescent; "The Old Men," who live with "the peaceful beer of impotence"; the poems to his father; and to his mother, Raquel Ellen Rose Hoheb; "Divertimiento," with its tribute to Bach and his three wives and twenty-two children.

Williams, like any true spring poet, is a love poet. His lyrics chant more than the conventions of the divine relation: they chant its passions, its ecstasies, tragedies and farces. He sings straight out from the centre of things. Radii and circumferences do not interest him. Meanwhile, at the bottom of his energies and hourly activities, there is no cure for his loneliness. Dance though he will, and nobody dances more, he must dance alone. He has not yet learned that all originals must dance solos, that friends most of all are of little use to the pristine spirit. His call for companions ultimately drew disciples around him. They are excellent fellows, each with a definite talent of his own. But the sooner he packs them off or they pack him off, the better for poetry. They have involved Williams in a host of poetic theories of no consequence in the face of his poetry, and, in his hell-bent hysteria after wider recognition, he has allowed the disciples to help him fight his public battles.

The spectacle is more tragic than tiresome. No amount of glorious controversy can atone for the loss of a single poet. Williams is by no means lost. But his adolescent persistence in courting fame, of explaining himself in the midst of his writing, of quoting what Ezra says about him, has become unnecessary and stupidly redundant. It is time for Williams to shed Pound, his friends and disciples; along with his imaginary enemies. The Rutherford wildcat was once a poet of the front rank. He knows enough about life, about death, about art, about science, about all things, to realize that poetry, nothing but poetry, should be his main concern.

Wallace Gould is even less known to the public than Stevens and Williams. With a still greater zest for life than the Hartford lawyer and the Rutherford medico, the Maine poet, now a hermit in Virginia, has worked in obscurity for more than twenty years. Lacking the cultural advantages of the other two, Gould, an aristocrat by birth though a poor man in pocket, cultivated himself at the source of existence. Though the least bookish of men, Gould is an artist, an artist slow to emerge, but all the more fundamental because of the time it has taken for him to develop. His first book, "Children Of The Sun," 1917, dedicated to his Lewiston neighbor, Marsden Hartley, had an individual touch. But only such poems as some of the "Nameless Poems" gave an indication of the unusual advance ahead. Out of a deep communion with life and with native speech came "Aphrodite And Other Poems," 1928—a book of the first order. Gould reversed the customary American procedure of opening brilliantly and dying of success and inanition. The rich fibre of his being, the perfect trust in himself, the large experience, heroic serenity and broad wisdom, attuned to a Pagan body and spirit, have planted him solidly in our soil and poetry. Once upon a time there were Pagans in Yankee New England. Gould is a descendant of these, almost the last of the tribe, and almost the first to set himself on paper. It is typical of paradoxical New England to give us our first Pagan poet. The presence of the Greeks in his work is no mere scholarly

transplantation. Aphrodite, Endymion, Heracles and the other old gods and heroes are native to the poet's nature. Once upon a time he found such spirits in Maine, or in the blood of his people flowing through his body. If he turned to the classics, he was not seeking an escape from his own soil, but an identification of himself with the first Pagans. Though he cannot read Greek, he is at home with the Greeks and has made them at home in America. Felt through Gould's consciousness, how close to our lives they come through his stately measures. Gods and mankind mingle as naturally as once they did in Hellas. The gods are humans and the humans are godlike.

Like many another fine poet, Gould studied music first. When he had to prostitute music to a livelihood—by playing pianos in moving picture houses—he divorced himself from Bach and Beethoven and shut down the lid for good. Nor is the man a hermit by nature. Having lived the whole of life at a fairly early age, having given himself completely and taken life completely, he retired to those perspectives which afford the broadest base for expression. He is the slowest of men to commit himself to paper: having written one draft, he revises and revises a poem ad infinitum. He has had less contact with fellow artists than any of his contemporaries. For about twelve years, I knew the man only by mail. It is not a part of criticism or of pseudo criticism to discuss a poet outside his work, but I am willing to risk the pillory by stating that I have never read such letters as the letters of Wallace Gould. They are written in the grand manner, a manner he has made his own in his poetry. Until he came to New York at the age of forty, Gould had seen practically nothing of so-called civilized towns. There was no need of it; he was completely civilized himself. He stayed in town a few months and then struck southward, strolling willy-nilly, and ultimately stopping in the old Virginia town where he has lived alone with his noble cats for a number of years. Southern aristocracy is native to him, the more so as it is rich in things of the spirit and destitute of worldly goods.

Of the will to live alone, there are several references in "Children Of The Sun." The mood is not one of melancholy, but of

a will to achieve an active solitude. It is not that human contacts have disillusioned him. He has known every human contact without bitterness. If he asks a "dear brown devil of a sparrow" to

> Fly away and sing above the dung of the streets
> and leave me to sing above the dung of the ages—

it is because he is in search, not of dissolution, but of enduring values. On the surface, he may have turned his back on life and humanity, but not in the deeps where memories loom in full-length portraits undisturbed by the ephemeral noises of civilization. Given the time to brood over the past, the past is ever present, is actually more real than the present. The mind has had time to catch up with the heart, to consider its adventures in detachment, to synthesize experience. Each new experience, after one has lived fully, is a variation of the old. It is not an act of cowardice or escape to refuse the demands of fresh adventure. Nor is it resignation towards the past. It is simply the act of a wise man vigorous with mental and physical health. There are times when the solitude seems to groan for new people. These are but the momentary moods of a heart by no means insensitive to the march or the jazz of our age. The spirit takes cognizance of the moods and shapes them to its own devices: shapes them with a humor universal in its connotations. The anchorite is as much a man of the world as your latest New Yorker—even more so. He sees as well as feels experience without losing his equilibrium. Nothing can run away with him. He stands at the centre of his emotions and reveries like an implacable Buddha, a human Buddha. The large animal is never phlegmatic, nor does it yearn for Nirvanas, or erect religions or philosophic systems. Generations of Goulds have lived on the Kennebec River. One of them commanded a ship that sailed the Orient. There is something of a leader in Wallace Gould, a leader of the earth over which he presides: the earth in himself.

Gould, in "Aphrodite," is a master of broad, swinging lines, lines as broad as the Kennebec's, as broad as Whitman's, and more

musical. They are never obscure nor obvious; they never halt nor digress, but move in a lordly stream notable for its natural undulations. Again, as with Stevens and Marianne Moore, it is difficult to quote in detail. The poems are too large for emasculation. I refer the reader to the book itself, a book which has had no such sale as the books of three other Maine poets: Longfellow, Robinson and Millay. In addition to such human narratives as "Aphrodite" and "Endymion," there are the Maine narratives about the Bard family, Anne, Rosalind and Alice, and about Marnia, each an aristocrat who bloomed to the full and decayed in a noble fashion—women who are likened to thoroughbreds. Among the shorter poems, called "Others" in honor of bygone days, there are many moods and rhythms. In a voluptuous poem, courtesans emigrating southward are compared to the exodus of the biblical host of Israel, to the Puritan host embarking at Southampton for Plymouth—"but not of such peoples would I ever sing."

> I hear the pattering of innumerable satined feet,
> and of little hands that smooth out linen to be packed away for future use.
> I see innumerable porcelain faces beaming out from depths of sable, fox, ermine, seal, beaver.
> I hear a thunder of thuds, echoing about the North, at the closing of innumerable lids of trunks.
> I hear another thunder of thuds, echoing likewise, at the closing of innumerable doors of limousines.

The poet determines to visit Madame, "that I may make the songs of this movement of lovely beings—ladies of passage, southward bound." The same expansive gesture greets "Two Hellenic Heads," an Egyptian sarcophagus, Villon, the Discobolus, Catullus, the drunken Heracles, niggers singing lies "to the broom, the watermelon, the wind, the moon." Heracles is urged to step high, to "whoop, bellow, brag, to the sound of timbrel and flute, the praise of men, the giggle of gods."

> My countrymen would say that you disgrace yourself, as a national hero, even to the point of disqualification,
> and surely would squirm at the sight of your august bareness,—

for almost all my countrymen are sexual sceptics, atheists even,
who do not trust in their maker,—
but I should like to see our own big man, our Washington,
returning to us from old Alexandria, in exactly your condition,
followed by a pair of pretty flappers playing ukuleles
and tittering with the orthodox among us.

Of poems with love as the theme, none of our poems are grander than "To W," "Moment Musicale," "Communion," "After Tschaikowsky"—

All is over with all the flowers—
They grew where they would, and they are dying.
They were sown, or were planted, and they are dying.
The clover persisted, long, but now it succumbs. It is withered.
It adds to the tawn of the countryside.
I wait. But I do not weep. I do not care.

The closing lines of "Communion" are the closing lines of the book:

"I am glad that no one stands at my elbow.
I am glad that all my cravings are buried in the snows.
I am glad that all my emotions are absent, with the winds, the clouds, the moon.
I am glad that they whom I have loved are as far off as the stars."

"Moment Musicale" happens to be my favorite American love poem. Among the other Pagan chants, there are "Vigil," "To A Friend" (in which friendship receives a tremendous test), "Eden" (wherein flowers of the roadside are Eden enough), and the glamorous poems about cats: "The Penitents" and "Postscript." If cats have been the companions of poets hitherto, they are more than companions to Gould. They are his life and his is theirs. A Virginian friend writing to the poet puts in the playful phrase—"Your cats clambering over the walls of Paradise." Wallace Gould responds:

I do not want to enter Paradise.
I do not like its plan, its personnel.
If I should be forced to live through another existence,
I should aspire to one great happiness,

that of pausing outside the walls—
not by the gates, and not with the loud laudations in hearing,
but at a spot far off from all such sounds,
and from the presence of dogs, which would no doubt enter with their faithful masters.
There, alone, I should raise my voice in the voweled call
that had once resounded about our acres, and beyond them, echoing,
now by day,
now by night,
and had brought my little friends to me,
scampering homeward in various directions,
and calling to me in their own fashion.
There I should stand, calling, waiting for all to come—
all save those who died too young to remember my voice. For many are dead—

and mine is the hand that poured each vial of mercy.
I hope that mine alone will be the hand to kill the rest.
As the pioneer of the prairie killed the helpless of his heart, at hearing
the yell of the triumphant savage, so I shall kill my own.
I know too much about a fate of which my little friends know nothing,
ever to let them live when I no longer hold my earthly acres. . . .

If such as I have visioned were to be our common fate in heaven,
I know that my cats would scorn the very walls of Paradise.

We now come to the youngest artist of the free verse movement: E. E. Cummings of Cambridge. He is the most sensational and most popular of the group, and we owe his discovery to *The Dial* (a magazine which has suspended publication since my pages on Marianne Moore). Cummings is not as eccentric as he looks on paper. About ten or twelve years younger than the poets discussed above, the downeast daredevil "went to school with *Others*"—as he candidly confessed at a first meeting. His typographical designs, so often derided by critics, are an extension of the word-arrangements of Apollinaire, Mina Loy, Marianne Moore, Pound, Williams, etc., and his highjinks and acrobatics have their basis not alone in these poets, but in such obscure fellows as Robert Carlton Brown. Cultivated from

fingertips to toes, Cummings arrived when free verse had an established tradition, and he had the genius to twine and twist it into original shapes. An artist like the mesdames Loy and Moore, Cummings developed an eye for the printed word. His designs are natural transcriptions of words to paper. Examining the content of the poems, one finds the poet has gone to school with the romantic rhetoricians of an earlier day, and that Swinburne is his nearest fleshly relative. Cummings' Paganism is as much a reaction against New England Puritanism as it is a passionate embrace of the earth and its ladies. Behind his beautiful gamboling, one hears the heartbeats, subtle and exquisite, of a poet steeped in sentiment. He is the love poet of the radical era, and his love, thanks to an antipathy for the Cambridge school, is denuded of all save nudity. Cummings is a fascinating fellow. Some of the fascination is due to his interpretation of the World War (vide his glorious novel, "The Enormous Room"), and of the era of realistic disillusion mothered by the Armistice. The savage jazz age which came to birth about ten years ago found its best poet in Cummings. He is a brilliant compound of love, romance, idealism, antipathy, realism, slang, prohibition, booze, jazz and more jazz. The fact that he had to publish some of his poems privately, because of their risqué verities, added enormously to his public appeal. The newly aroused demand for first editions, printed behind Mrs. Grundy's back, began with the advent of the youth from Harvard Town. Since 1923, his prolific energies have mustered five books of poems: "Tulips And Chimneys" (a title symbolical of natural and civilized sex), & (the signature for "and" and for his initials), "XLI Poems," "is 5," and "Him," the astounding poetic play.

"Tulips and Chimneys" opens with an "Epithalamion" rivaling Swinburne in its sumptuous array of images and progression of rhythms. The subject matter is banal enough: a hymn to Spring and the union of desire with desire:

> Spring, that omits no mention of desire
> in every curved and curling thing, yet holds
> continuous intercourse—through skies and trees

the lilac's smoke the poppy's pompous fire
the pansy's purple patience and the grave
frailty of daisies—by what rare unease
revealed of teasingly transparent folds—
with man's poor soul superlatively brave.

The chant closes with an invocation to Venus, and beseeches a blessing for her "suppliant singer and his wandering word." There are a number of lovely love songs in a similar metrical scheme, and some in which the scheme is more unique. Certain lines bear classical echoes: "Thy fingers make early flowers of all things"; "All in green went my love riding"; "For every mile the feet go the heart goes nine." "Puella Mea" is one of those academic tributes to a lady superior to the ladies of Omar and Hafiz, the Iseult of Tristram, the Salome of Herod, the Guenever of Launcelot, the ladies of Chaucer and Boccaccio. It is not until we arrive at the "Chansons Innocentes" that the new Cummings emerges.

in Just-
spring when the world is mud-
luscious the little
lame baloonman

whistles far and wee

and eddieandbill come
running from marbles and
piracies and it's
spring

when the world is puddle-wonderful

The invention of hyphenated words and of such combinations as "eddieandbill" belong not alone to Cummings but to the enthusiastic exaggerations of New York pavements. Cummings came to slang via Sandburg, and employs it with richer artistry than the Chicago poet. Too often, the lanky Carl drags in slang for its own sake and builds a Whitmanesque catalogue. "Orientale" and "Amores" are further love groups. "Come hither, O thou, is life not love?—" "Come hither, O thou, is love not death?" Love is usually a worshiper "sobbing with

lust." If the poet believes in death, "it is because you have loved me." Straightening the lines into prose, we find that the accomplished rhetoric, the eccentric design, reveal a devotion to woman not at all iconoclastic. Ancient sentiments are brought up-to-date by a sensitive artist-musician. Better than the love poems are the poems on death: a field in which the poet drives his profoundest appeal with a kind of dizzy gayety. The daring exquisite knew death at first hand on French battlefields. In the group called "La Guerre," the earth answers death with spring. No one has ever approached the grave with as much delight as Cummings, unless it be Emily Dickinson. Here are none of those steps of the later metaphysicians, heavily following the lead of Eliot.

> Buffalo Bill's
> defunct
> who used to
> ride a watersmooth-silver
> stallion
> and break onetwothreefourfive pigeons justlikethat
> Jesus
> he was a handsome man
> and what I want to know is
> how do you like your blueeyed boy
> Mister Death

The world "is probably made of roses & hello: (of solongs and ashes)." The Chimneys of the book are composed of three groups of sonnets: "Realities," "Unrealities," "Actualities." The one about "the Cambridge ladies who live in furnished souls" and who "believe in Christ and Longfellow, both dead," is an echo of Eliot. But the rest are typical of Cummings and his immolation of cabaret girls and prostitutes, his frolicking pictures of Coney Island, of "houses of ill repute," of carnality ad infinitum. The language is a blending of rhetoric with slang; and he has created a new sonnet form by dropping an occasional syllable from the immortal ten-a-line. There is a "little girl" who dreams

> of a time when the beautiful most of her
> (this here and This, do you get me?)

will maybe dance and maybe sing and be
abslatively posolutely dead,
like Coney Island in winter

Downright poignancy cleaves the gay girl apart. Furthermore, Cummings has made an accurate transcription of pavement and redlight speech: "eet smeestaire stevensun kum een, dare ease Bet, an Leelee, an dee beeg wun." Like Oscar Wilde and his brood, the poet sees Magdalene among the drabs; but at least he unfolds her realistically. Though there are cemeteries everywhere—"that's the Black People, chérie, who live under stones—" there is always another spring, another kiss. "Then you will slowly kiss me" is the last line of "Tulips And Chimneys," and the customary period to Cummings' philosophy.

In the next three volumes, his muse goes in for greater audacities, burlesque, folderol. He even favors the readers with a foreword, at the request of his publishers—a foreword stating absolutely nothing in terms of shrewd evasion. The poet, now aware of his audience, capers with the air of "Peck's Bad Boy," thumbing invisible noses, scrawling the naughtiest words on fences, playing the shell game, mimicking Barnum, and behaving on the whole like a prestidigitator conscious of the divine truism that the public loves nothing so much as being bamboozled. The super-intelligent are as deeply delighted as the boors, for the poet winks at the former as much as to say: "You and I are in the know." Since the highbrows have taken to vaudeville, Cummings is their favorite Touchstone. At times, he overplays the clown; at others, he has the instinct of a perfect comedian. When he is perfect, no poet is more dazzling; when he plays the bad boy too many times, one has an itch for spanking and shooing him to bed. The host of willful obscurities, fake profundities and wisecracks irritate an honest admirer. They belong to the halls of the Algonquin, the columns of *Vanity Fair,* and not among the pages over which the poet wields the wand of Oberon. Of the fairies who troop in his train, not even the sexual perverts are obnoxious—until they advertise their trade in terms supposed to be shocking. Quoting "Frankie And Johnnie" and writing variations on Cow-

boy and Bowery tunes are acceptable so long as the author refrains from sticking out his chest and poking it with a singular finger. No one is offended with indecency so long as it is hearty and clean. The moment it assumes bugaboo rôles, it grows nauseous: one almost yearns for the good old days of the Cambridge Longfellow. It took Americans a long time to write about sex and a still longer time to dare to indulge in pornography. Pornography was not discovered by Cummings. One can find it as far back as Mark Twain and Eugene Field—and even a touch or two in Longfellow himself. The grandest book of all has yet to be printed: Eliot's "King Bolo And His Great Black Queen." If you mention the book to its author, he smiles a pontifical smile and shakes a pontifical head. The Eliot book is masculine, the pornography of Cummings catty and effeminate. None the less, the three volumes contain splendid things, and it is not a squeamish reader who complains of the conscious perversities of a Puritan in love with the Pagan. Again I prefer the many delicious variations on death, once more saved from extinction by the primavera and "a lady whose name is Afterwards." The typography has grown many steps more daring without offending the intelligence:

ta
ppin
g
toe

hip
popot
amus Back

gen
teel-ly
lugu-
bri ous
eyes
LOOPTHELOOP

as

fathandsbangrag

Lewis Carroll, Apollinaire and the Dadas had accustomed us to such designs. Cummings has much more to say than the Dadas. And he is infinitely more gaga than those bored young Parisians despairing about post-war life and art over a not very cynical glass of absinthe. Of the many delightful diatribes on living in America after the Volstead Act, none is more withering than this sonnet:

"next to of course god america i
love you land of the pilgrims' and so forth oh
say can you see by the dawn's early my
country 'tis of centuries come and go
and are no more what of it we should worry
in every language even deafanddumb
thy sons acclaim your glorious name by gorry
by jingo by gee by gosh by gum
why talk of beauty what could be more beaut-
iful than these heroic happy dead
who rushed like lions to the roaring slaughter
they did not stop to think they died instead
then shall the voices of liberty be mute?"

He spoke. And drank rapidly a glass of water

Here is the savage let loose on bogus American patriotism.

"Him," the three-act play, is an extraordinary extravaganza produced by the Provincetown Players, fathers of the first productions of Eugene O'Neill and others among our best playwrights. Despite its indebtedness to German expressionism, Lawson's "Processional," Joyce's "Ulysses," Andreyev's "He Who Gets Slapped," a volume called "Puppet Plays," and many another pioneer source, "Him" could have been written by no one but Cummings. Employing every conceivable theatrical, poetical and prose device, the kaleidoscopic scenes dash by with the speed of cinemas. Tragedy, farce, love, sexuality, profanity, buffoonery, wisdom, pornography, idealism, realism, egoism, dualism and death play the very deuce with an audience. It is the most daredevil work of our most daredevil author, and were it not for a recurrence of cute obscenities and tongues in the cheek, one could readily pronounce the play a masterly affair. The love scenes are among the finest the stage has known

since the days of romantic Elizabeth, and the realistic scenes, verging on melodrama and hysteria, vie with O'Neill. The American theatre should belong to the American poet, as well as the Broadway playwright. If ever some small hole on Broadway opens its doors to poets with a dramatic instinct, a profound revolution will come: one which may ultimately rival the poetic theatre of Greece, of Rome, of the Renaissance, of Elizabeth, of Paris, of Russia. This is neither a boast nor a prophecy. It is based on the knowledge that poets were the leading dramatists of classical eras, and on a conviction that our race has several poets who, given the boards and the money to produce their ideas, would lay the ground of a sterling American theatre, based not on high-brow theories, but on the poetry of life set into motion by the creative imagination. "Him" is an earnest of glorious days ahead. With all its vanities on the part of the author, posturing in front of his public, ogling his knowing friends and outraging the Babbitts of the town, "Him" contains great material and a number of noble scenes, not the least noble of which are the descents into "slums and brothels." Cummings is at work on another play, and one hopes for his sake alone that he will give us his best, and not his best interrupted with his second best. If he can forget himself, his admirers and Mrs. Grundy, and write straight out from the heart of which he is ashamed and has no reason to be ashamed, he will compose a masterly play. To date, Cummings, like so many other quasi-major Americans, is still an adolescent. He cannot shake off the past the evil shades of our tradition have involved him in. He should accept the shades once for all—or what for him are the evil, namely the Puritan—and dance straight out into the open. He has a large enough audience: a growing crowd that is "with him to a man." It is a human group worthy of the best in any man, a group unworthy of betrayal, even for the fraction of a second.

XXV

T. S. ELIOT AND THE WASTE LAND

No contact possible to flesh
Allayed the fever of the bone.
T. S. Eliot.

THOMAS STEARNS ELIOT of St. Louis, a descendant of cultivated New Englanders, is the leader of most of the latest poetry and criticism in America—not to mention his influence over a fair portion of Britain. An indubitable man of genius, he owes his exalted position to a number of causes: he is, despite his disbelief in originality, an original poet and critic; he represents the crumbling of the Nineteenth and early Twentieth centuries from the heights of individual romanticism to the depth of a conglomerate and equally romantic despair; he struck down almost en masse the romantic poets of Nineteenth Century England and reverted to the metaphysicians and wits of earlier eras—from Ben Jonson to Dryden, Webster to Donne and Marvell; he revived these poets through himself and transplanted the sophistry and disillusionment of poets of the Latin decadence and of modern French Symbolism; he became the leading expatriate of our time, and what is even more glamorous, was accepted by Mayfair and endowed with a magazine he was astute enough to name *The Criterion;* and he has worn throughout his career an enigmatic mask composed of subtlety, precision, candor and evasion, and done so with consistent integrity. His power over youthful Americans is a little on the wane, but the apostasy discernible in sycophants who formerly knelt at the shrine is composed of the envy of little fellows who propose to supplant Eliot. Unhappily, they have a greater talent for literary politics than for literature. One must look toward young poets, outside Eliot's circle, for a further development of American poetry. Our leading poetic representative

at the court of St. James had a magic influence over young Americans so long as they did not kneel in abject mimicry. His determination to revise, rewrite and pass on the (to him) substantial base of classical poetry inspired the modernist loyalty to esthetic perfection. Eliot has never encouraged imitators. Inside his conscious limitations, he is probably the greatest esthetic critic since Coleridge and his American moonshadow, Poe. Just as Poe's criticism, even more than his poetry, has had the profoundest effect on the course of other men's work—most notably in France and the Symbolists, and then homeward via Pound and the Imagists—so the critical genius of Eliot, even more than his poetry, has swayed the work of the latest Americans.

The impulse toward free adventure, individualism, experiment, is virtually at an end, temporarily at least. The influence of Whitman, the towering rebel, the multifarious liberties of the free verse brigade—these have had their day in the sun. The moon is now in the heavens, the moon of melancholia, of despair, of astrologers and metaphysicians, of artists pursuing art for its own sake, art removed from independence and selfhood. We are in an era of impersonality, of supposed impersonality. The lens of science, disclosing man not as a ruler of himself and his destiny, but as one of the atoms infesting the cosmos, has destroyed or submerged the ego—apparently. Luckily for certain romantics among us, scientists themselves and the process of the objective mind are equally contradictory, fallible and romantic. The process depends on the imagination, as well as the reason. Many a fact is discovered as the result of a creative inquiry; and the fact is ultimately disproved, conditioned or supplanted by something more advanced, discovered by some one more intuitive than his forerunners. Any creative system is the outcome of a series of glorious findings on the part of successive generations combining in the search for truth, for beauty, for wisdom and knowledge. Each new genius takes hold of the sum of man's revelations and revalues it in the light of his own day. But he does something more. The sum of experience is touched with his own person, and that person, if

he is more than a cultivated disciple, carries on the inquiry by virtue of something incorrect in the system, or something overlooked by the giants of the past. He may bend himself to a continued objective mission, since he is but another atom scratching away on the cosmos, and sees himself as such. But if he adds or changes one thing in the realm of science or art, he has done something no one has done before, and the race is wise in naming the thing after its creator. I am delving in a field foreign to my temperament in an attempt to show that Eliot, constantly submitting to discipline, and loyal to "a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality," is none the less an individual. His consciousness may hold the sum of all he has learned of the past; but this erudition—or what he has chosen and what he has scorned—is conditioned by his ego, and receives a new imprint in the revaluations and extensions he works out on paper. Eliot is original, nay, a romanticist creating an imagined impersonality. Unluckily, his followers have adopted the letter instead of the spirit of his inquiry.

Whitman envisioned a race of men who would follow him by being, not echoes of himself, but replicas of themselves. Walt was a visionary glutting himself in the sun and raising the average man to divinity, a divinity he saw in himself and felt in all things and races. Democracy was discredited after the World War and the failure of Wilson to establish a universal peace among all nations. The nations are farther apart than ever before: the war betrayed certain fundamental animosities which have grown tenfold in the last ten years. Diplomatic gestures and charming political documents only serve to widen the breech: everybody hates and suspects everybody else, and among the races of the world the American is the most thoroughly hated. Our democratic theories, as carried out by our captains of war and peace, directed by our colonels of industry, have descended to a mass of shrewd bargainings tending to add to American wealth as much of the wealth of the world as we can aggrandize without getting caught in the open. Behind our brazen virtues, we are a vicious people, a people devoted to or

enslaved by our material leaders. The war had the soundly beneficial effect of destroying false illusions and tearing fine masks from filthy faces. No race came off well in the process, and the American least of all. We nailed our flag higher than the rest; the fall was that much greater. We are not alone not a democratic people, but the Democracy we carried to Europe was shown to be an arrant hypocrisy. The remaining American idealists—mostly an impractical crew—may console themselves with the conclusion that Democracy is impossible of attainment by any human race; nor is it even an ideal worth following any longer. Whitman, after all, was a tremendous prophet, and was himself Democracy—as he felt and chanted. The Eliot régime is based on the general disillusionment of the World War aftermath. Eliot adopted the aristocracy of the intellect over the cruder emotions, conscious, however, of the fact that the world is ruled, not by the integrity of intelligence, but by the brute instincts, marvelously developed, of men who rule the mass of people politically. The fact that these men are elected by the people adds to the poet's disdain, forces him deeper into himself, and has made his aristocratic art a thing of complete despair. And despair is the keynote of the latest generation. Eliot writes less and less poetry and more and more criticism as the forties of his life unfold. The world is in a chaos, and "The Waste Land" is virtually his last poem on the tragic theme. Occasionally, he lets fall a few lines carefully gathered in single pamphlets notable for their preciosity. The poet is dead and long live the critic.

Eliot's influence is remarkable in view of the extent of his writing: two slender volumes of poetry, three of criticism. Most of his poetry was begun years ago; some of it is remembered by Harvard classmates; and, unless I am misinformed, lines from "The Waste Land" had already been written at Cambridge. Poems of Eliot's were known to readers of *The Egoist, Poetry* and *Others* (largely through the efforts of Pound) at least twelve years ago: "Prufrock," "Portrait Of A Lady," "Preludes," "Rhapsody Of A Windy Night," "La Figlia Che Piange." A volume called "Prufrock" came out in London in

1917. With a few additions, an American edition entitled, "Poems," was issued three years later; and a revised edition two years ago. It contains but twenty-four numbers—four in the French tongue. After his graduation from Harvard, graced with two masters' degrees, Eliot studied at the Sorbonne and at Oxford, taught and lectured, worked in a bank, and then accepted the anonymous editorship of *The Criterion.* He has lived in London since 1914 and has never returned to our shores. Recently, he became a British citizen, and more recently a member of the Anglo-Catholic Church. In his latest book of essays, he announced his faith in Anglo-Catholicism, classical literature and royalty in politics. He is now at work on three small volumes: "The Principles Of Modern Heresy," "The School Of Donne," "The Outline Of Royalism." When Walt Whitman died, Eliot was about three years old. What changes have touched the American scene in the past forty years—or the past fifteen, ten, five. In 1922, "The Waste Land" came out in London; I was there at the time and enjoyed the ensuing controversy. *The Dial* imported the poem soon after, and gave Eliot the *Dial* Award for the year. His public recognition began with that award.

The key to an approximate understanding of Eliot's poems, if one is puzzled by the poems, may be found in the three Hogarth essays expressing his admiration for Jonson, Webster, Donne, Dryden, Marvell. The person familiar with Eliot's poems will find in the essays an indirect argument in behalf of qualities present in Eliot, as well as in the poets under discussion. The critic praises the magniloquence and wit of Dryden: it is precisely these qualities which predominate in his own poetry. He also praises the element of surprise in poetry, an element demanded by Poe. "Dryden's method here (in MacFlecknoe) is something very near to parody; he applies vocabulary, images, and ceremony which arouse epic associations of grandeur, to make an enemy helplessly ridiculous. But the effect, though disastrous for the enemy, is very different from that of the humor which merely belittles, such as the satire of Mark Twain. Dryden continually enhances: he makes his object great, in a

way contrary to expectation; and the total effect is due to the transformation of the ridiculous into poetry." A similar transformation takes place in Eliot. The old men he writes about, the derelicts, the frustrates, the housemaids, the neurasthenic ladies, the middle-aged men defeated by their own physical and mental limitations, are lifted from the prosaic by an analytic wit that picks them apart and a synthetic imagination which puts them together in relation to larger considerations. Such dramatic monologues as "Gerontion," "Prufrock," "Portrait Of A Lady," attain their grandeur through a transmutation of the tawdry into the universal. We cannot laugh at such people without laughing at ourselves. They are hypersensitive creatures of our age who probe their lives with little or no satisfaction, and are powerless to make of themselves more than they happen to be. They are Lilliputians eaten with self-pity: the disease infesting most up-to-date people who analyze all they feel and sit in a spineless activity, doing nothing and thinking everything. A more tragic race has never peopled the earth, and it seems to be common to every land.

> *Thou hast nor youth nor age*
> *But as it were an after dinner sleep*
> *Dreaming of both.*

There are no young people in Eliot, but middle-aged folk looking backward, or looking forward with a backward glance. Gerontion is "an old man, a dull head among windy spaces."

> I have lost my passion: why should I need to keep it
> Since what is kept must be adulterated?

So he goes on, surrounded by "thoughts of a dry brain in a dry season." The followers of Eliot, fellows in their early twenties, are equally old little men.

"The Love Song Of J. Alfred Prufrock," Eliot's masterpiece, has been mimicked by countless poets on both sides of the Atlantic, and mimicked in vain. The most downright commonplace achieves an epic tone by virtue of the universality of moods and actions caught in a diction utterly familiar and full

of surprising turns. The ordinary speech is arranged with reference to its inherent orotundity. The rhythmic syllables are beautifully orchestrated without losing their fidelity to actuality. This is not, as Untermeyer dubs it, *vers-de-société*, but an intense study in dynamic portraiture for which most modern men might have sat. Prufrock has experienced everything: "I have measured out my life with coffee spoons."

> And I have known the eyes already, known them all—
> The eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase,
> And when I am formulated, sprawling on a pin,
> When I am pinned and wriggling on the wall,
> Then how should I begin
> To spit out all the butt-ends of my days and ways?

And he has known all the arms—"arms that lie along a table, or wrap about a shawl." Like the heroes of Proust and Joyce, Prufrock recreates his life through reflection and meditation—or like the heroes of Jules Laforgue, master of aristocratic weariness ennobled by princely speech. Further analogies may be found in "The Closed Door" of Jean de Bosschère, the Flemish poet whom Eliot most closely resembles. Prufrock is afraid to adventure farther among the living, or to go courting all over again:

> Should I, after tea and cakes and ices,
> Have the strength to force the moment to its crisis?
> But though I have wept and fasted, wept and prayed,
> Though I have seen my head (grown slightly bald) brought in upon a platter,
> I am no prophet—and here's no great matter;
> I have seen the moment of my greatness flicker
> And I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat, and snicker,
> And in short, I was afraid.

There is always the danger of incurring a rebuff: the lady might say: "That is not what I meant, at all." Prufrock is not Hamlet, but "an attendant lord . . . an easy tool,"

> Deferential, glad to be of use,
> Politic, cautious, and meticulous;
> Full of high sentence, but a bit obtuse;

At times, indeed, almost ridiculous—
Almost, at times, the Fool.

I grow old . . . I grow old . . .
I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled.

Shall I part my hair behind? Do I dare to eat a peach?
I shall wear white flannel trousers, and walk upon the beach.
I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each.

But not to him. There, among the waves, a trance carries him, a trance unbroken, "Till human voices wake us, and we drown."

There we leave the jaded Prufrock, a noble little puppet withal, epitome of the era of despair and disillusionment. "Portrait Of A Lady" is the obverse side of the modern tale. Here, a gentleman calls upon one whom, apparently, he has once possessed and is weary of now. She prepares the web of a further event by saving "this afternoon for you,"

And four wax candles in the darkened room,
Four rings of light upon the ceiling overhead,
An atmosphere of Juliet's tomb
Prepared for all the things to be said, or left unsaid.

The affair has descended to conversation, "among velleities and carefully caught regrets." The woman leads the talk, does all the talking in fact, along the avenue of friendship, in the hope of creating a still warmer atmosphere: an atmosphere she touches by having lilacs in her room when lilacs are in bloom. Listening to her "insistent out-of-tune of a broken violin," the man goes on drinking tea. He is young, she says, and invulnerable: "you have no Achilles' heel."

"But what have I, but what have I, my friend,
To give you, what can you receive from me?
Only the friendship and the sympathy
Of one about to reach her journey's end.

I shall sit here, serving tea to friends. . . ."

He takes his hat and hurries outdoors:

You will see me any morning in the park
Reading the comics and the sporting page.

Particularly I remark
An English countess goes upon the stage.
A Greek was murdered at a Polish dance,
Another bank defaulter has confessed.

He remains self-possessed, though aware of "the smell of hyacinths . . . recalling things that other people have desired." A third and last visit ensues. The man is ill at ease, for he is bringing news of a sudden trip abroad. And when does he return?

"But that's a useless question.
You hardly know when you are coming back,
You will find so much to learn."
My smile falls heavily among the bric-à-brac.
"Perhaps you can write to me."

The gentleman shudders. The woman goes on talking, wonders "why we have not developed into friends—" all her friends had expected it.

"We must leave it now to fate.
You will write, at any rate.
Perhaps it is not too late.
I shall sit here, serving tea to friends."

The pitiful soul lies pitifully exposed by the pitiless wit. If she dies,

Would she not have the advantage, after all?
This music is successful with a "dying fall"
Now that we talk of dying—
And should I have the right to smile?

In an attempt to analyze the quality of wit, Eliot, in his comment on Marvell, frankly confesses the difficulties of pinning down a conclusive definition. His self-doubt in the midst of his precision and candor is always admirable. After finding Browning (to whom he owes a good deal) "oddly miniature, in some way, beside Marvell," he states: "And nowadays we find occasionally good irony, or satire, which lack wit's internal equilibrium, because their voices are essentially protests against some outside sentimentality or stupidity; or we find serious poets who are afraid of acquiring wit, lest they lose intensity. The quality

which Marvell had, this modest and certainly impersonal virtue —whether we call it wit or reason, or even urbanity—we have patently failed to define." Eliot has this "internal equilibrium," "this modest and certainly impersonal virtue," this "urbanity," and to a degree beyond any of his contemporaries, with the possible exception of Stevens. And he has intensity, an intensity under perfect control. His tales are steeped in tragedy, but his self-discipline is too severe to permit him to participate in the feelings of his characters. Prufrock and the lady shatter the reader through the "internal equilibrium" of the poet's art. The emotional upheavals of Eugene O'Neill leave me cold by comparison. Self-restraint is one of the great weapons in a tragic author's armory. Eliot is a tragedian who refashions experience through wit and magniloquence. He is not a great poet, but he belongs in the grand tradition of Shakespeare and Marlowe. He should have been born in the Seventeenth Century, or the Eighteenth. As it is, his exquisite sensibilities have bravely responded to the mood of the Twentieth.

The poems in massive quatrains, urbane juxtapositions, masculinity of thought and expression, have had an even broader influence in forming an Eliot school, the school the poet frowns upon. There are seven of these: The Sweeney series, "Burbank With A Baedeker: Bleistein With A Cigar," "A Cooking Egg," "The Hippopotamus," "Whispers Of Immortality" and "Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service." Imitative authors have written hundreds of poems in this method. Seven have sufficed their creator, and they retain their baffling superiority. Eliot finds it "extremely difficult to define metaphysical poetry" and "difficult to decide what poets practice it and in which of their verses." He finds it most clearly in Donne. "Donne, and often Cowley, employ a device which is sometimes considered characteristically 'metaphysical'; the elaboration (contrasted with the condensation) of a figure of speech to the farthest stage to which ingenuity can carry it. . . . This telescoping of images and multiplied association is characteristic of the phrase of some of the dramatists of the period which Donne knew: not to mention Shakespeare, it is frequent in

Middleton, Webster, and Tourneur, and is one of the sources of the vitality of their language. . . . The *structure* of the sentences, on the other hand, is sometimes far from simple, but this is not a vice; it is a fidelity to thought and feeling. . . . And as this fidelity induces variety of thought and feeling, so it induces variety of music." How definitely such criticism applies to Eliot's seven poems. A condensation of four events or actions opens Burbank and Bleistein, and does so with consummate ease:

> Burbank crossed a little bridge
> Descending at a small hotel;
> Princess Volupine arrived,
> They were together, and he fell.

And how deftly urbanity touches "A Cooking Egg":

> Pipit sat upright in her chair
> Some distance from where I was sitting;
> *Views of the Oxford Colleges*
> Lay on the table, with the knitting.

The three poems in which condensation and elaboration are completely mastered are "The Hippopotamus," "Whispers Of Immortality," "Sweeney Among The Nightingales." The first is a sardonic portrait of the Catholic Church:

> The hippo's feeble steps may err
> In compassing material ends,
> While the True Church need never stir
> To gather in its dividends. . . .
>
> At mating time the hippo's voice
> Betrays inflexions hoarse and odd,
> But every week we hear rejoice
> The Church, at being one with God.

"Whispers Of Immortality" opens with a battle between the spirit and the senses, as witnessed in Webster and Donne, and abruptly shifts to

> Grishkin is nice: her Russian eye
> Is underlined for emphasis;
> Uncorseted, her friendly bust
> Gives promise of pneumatic bliss.

In her physical presence, it is hard "to keep our metaphysics warm."

Much of our "hard-boiled" literature owes its inception to "Apeneck Sweeney,"

> Letting his arms hang down to laugh,
> The zebra stripes along his jaw
> Swelling to maculate giraffe.

The poem, though by no means clear at all points, has a savage frankness, controlled by the perfect nonchalance of the metre and rhymes. The sudden turns are not only surprising, but amazing. The remaining numbers in "Poems" are simpler than the polysyllabics, and fully as distinguished. The four preludes, and "Rhapsody On A Windy Night," "Morning At The Window," are dark visions of the pervading power of the commonplace:

> With the other masquerades
> That time resumes,
> One thinks of all the hands
> That are raising dingy shades
> In a thousand furnished rooms.

There are several biting Yankee etchings: "The Boston Evening *Transcript*," whose readers "sway in the wind like a field of ripe corn," "Aunt Helen," "Cousin Nancy" and "Mr. Appollinax." When the aunt, Miss Helen Slingsby, died, "the undertaker wiped his feet— He was aware that this sort of thing had happened before."

> And the footman sat upon the dining-table
> Holding the second housemaid on his knees—
> Who had always been so careful while her mistress lived.

Of an American tea-party he visits behind Appollinax's back, the poet only remembers "a slice of lemon, and a bitten macaroon." "Hysteria," a delightful prose poem, "Conversation Galante," a Verlanian dialogue, and "La Figlia Che Piange" close the volume. The poet has declined to repeat these forms. The slender extent of his work is due, in part, to an austere refusal to repeat former successes. Many another poet earns an

undue reputation by perfecting one string and playing upon it ad nauseam. Eliot is a steadfast gentleman who ignores the lures of the marketplace and saves his art from becoming a trade. This is perhaps his richest distinction.

Though "The Waste Land" is seven years old, and is virtually the last of Eliot's poems, one need merely mention the title to start another imbroglio. When the poem came out, it was received with mingled cries of derision, jubilation, hatred and adoration, with very little sanity in either camp. There was no middle-ground at the time, and there is scarcely any now. The detractors considered the thing an outrageous hoax, and even some of the devotees feared that the master was spoofing the enemy, and tempered their comments accordingly. Nearly everybody waited for somebody else to say the first word, secretly dreading the prospect of making an ass of himself. Other devotees wrote solemn disquisitions, elaborating the mysteries of the poem and finding arcana foreign to the intentions of its author. Eliot remained aloof from the cafés, maintaining a pontifical silence worthy of a pope stalking the Vatican gardens, and immersed in worldly meditations at a distance. Ultimately, the poet relieved the turmoil by penning addenda to the poem in the form of a glossary revealing the sources of certain lines. The modest notes aroused another controversy. In the face of the ambiguous spectacle of 1922, the man who now ventures finalities leaves himself open to further hilarity. People who take their poetry religiously were still more outraged by the effects of the poem than by the poem per se. Laughing right out in the court of Phœbus was considered *lesè majesté*. In reflecting on the intervening years since that autumn fell about our ears, I long for that autumn again. We are all of us solemn again—poets, critics and readers—nobody dares to smile or think of smiling. We are in the hands of a new generation, subscribing to Eliot's wisdom and taking each factor into account, excepting its humanism, its urbanity, its wit. "We find serious poets who are afraid of acquiring wit, lest they lose intensity." And yet, "The Waste Land" is a tragic poem, and no modern poem more tragic.

One must try to penetrate the mask of the poet and get at the heart of the man. Despite his impersonal ideal, his will to sacrifice himself at every turn, a man, not a classic tradition, wrote "The Waste Land." This man, intimately conscious of chaotic conditions, suffering the agonies of a race smitten with disillusionment, is enough of an artist-scientist to set things down in apparent detachment. He is one of the patients in the worldly hospital—a patient who neither twitches nor groans, whose self-discipline is tough enough to defeat every outward sign of agony. He is almost the only gentleman in the ward—a man unsmitten with self-pity. He knows what the agonies are and where the wounds gape and fester. Though his imagination wanders among earlier eras, girding itself with heroic traditions, he does not turn on an age to him so inferior, so moribund, as the present or the recent age. Even though he fails to see any cure for the age, any outcome except in extinction, and finds in the dawn no recrudescence of the glorious past, and no sign of a future worth living in, his catholic mind sets down another imperturbable line compact, not of bitterness, but of wit accepting the horrible facts and shaping an ordered life on paper. "The Waste Land," for all its vagaries and obscenities, its chaotic likeness to a chaotic background, has a definite program and philosophy. In the midst of the decline of Eastern Europe, of the falling towers of Jerusalem, Athens, Alexandria, Vienna, London—London "the unreal"—the thunder quotes an Upanishad: "Data, Dayadhvam, Damyata:" "Give, sympathize, control." The poem closes on the softly breathing syllables: "Shantih shantih shantih." "The Peace which passeth understanding," writes Eliot, "is a feeble translation of the content of this word." Peace, in any event, is the curtain to the tragedies of existence, as it was to the tragedies of the classical theatre. "The Waste Land" is the closing poem of the romantic era in British and American poetry. Eliot has written little or nothing since. We must look among the younger men, men outside his circle, for the next step ahead. Most of the older and middle-aged poets went to their graves with "The Waste Land."

T. S. Eliot and the Waste Land

In one of the "Three Dream Songs," issued in 1925, Eliot wrote the common epitaph:

> This is the dead land
> This is cactus land
> Here the stone images
> Are raised, here they receive
> The supplication of a dead man's hand
> Under the twinkle of a fading star.
>
> Is it like this
> In death's other kingdom
> Waking alone
> At the hour when we are
> Trembling with tenderness
> Lips that would kiss
> Form prayers to broken stone.

One does not have to accept this dream song. In Eliot's case, the outcome has embraced British royalty and Anglo-Catholicism. For him, this is not necessarily a retrogressive move. But I venture to say that it would be for me, and for others among us who are determined to carry the fight ahead, each in his doubtless cruder, blinder and more limited human capacities. Life of any sort in any land or age is worth working with, though the predestined end is certain to grow humiliating viewed in relation to what one tried to be and achieve. It is possible that a man who has suffered defeat a little more often than most of his fellows grows or degenerates into an incorrigible optimist. I find the pessimistic attitude, or the quasi pessimistic, too easy of acceptance. It is curious how many so-called fatalists live to an octogenarian age—witness Thomas Hardy, who stoutly fought to the last all charges of pessimism. One's actions are prompted not by theories of pessimism or optimism, but by the will to play the game with the cards in hand—a banal figure, alas. Some of us play on though Nature, Destiny or Whatyoumaycallem hold all the aces and trumps and we hold nothing but ignominious nines or "dieces." I refer to pinochle, rather than poker, because I was brought up on the German, not on the American game. What has this to do with our poetry?

Merely this: a "diece" may become the ace of trumps before the cards are laid away. There is no challenge behind the present diece, nor an air of prognostication in studying its prospects. If the diece remains a nine and is ultimately taken, not by an ace or trump, but by an almost as ignominious jack, one has had the privilege of participating in the sole game known to mankind. I consider my infinitesimal share a very high privilege, and am quietly grateful to the two shopkeepers who gave me an accidental birth in the city I love and loathe.

XXVI

THE DISCOVERIES OF STILL ANOTHER DAWN

—Angels of the wind,
With ear a-point for the enchanted note.
Léonie Adams.

IN approaching the records of the past ten years, and more particularly those of the past six or seven (since the birth of "The Waste Land"), the devotee of American poetry is confronted with a number of fascinating, of perplexing, and of tedious factors. Emerging among the poets of the poetic civil war which gave rise to the national renascence (about 1912 to '18), he will find it hard to resist harping on "the good old days" and to reveal himself a sentimental fogy deaf to the music of a later generation. The incredible thing has happened: he belongs to an older generation, and to his surprise finds himself tossed to the dust heap by valiant young poets and critics who look upon him as one of the encumbrances to their advance in the sun. The very tiny shadow he has cast is considered, not a reflection of his own body, but a reflection against the oncoming hordes. I do not employ this image in a mood of bitterness. I have known bitterness to tug at my throat, but have forced it aside along with the jealousies and grudges to which I am likewise subject. What I am trying to present is the figure of a person no longer young, who is fairly aware of the events of later days, and again to assure the reader that the figure lays no claim to omniscience or impersonality. I should also like to preface this present-day survey by stating that I have examined about a hundred books in advance—a staggering aggregation—and have followed, where I could, the work of poets in magazines, and in manuscripts yet to be printed. We have more poets than ever before, and a growing hospitality among pub-

lishers and periodicals. And a number of new magazines, brave and impecunious, have been founded by younger rebels—always a vital sign. The wilderness days in which my contemporaries were born are over. Likewise the type of serenity through which those fellows accepted continuous rejection. Nowadays, a poet appears in print almost overnight and castigates society for not giving him more and more room. But I must not grow reminiscential or stoop to snobbish comparisons. Though one earns more than ever before, the costs of living also mount overnight: the groans of the young poet are economic groans, and his hatred of his elders, an economic as well as esthetic mood. Nor do I sit in an easy-chair while concluding this long paragraph. The chairs from which most of us write, no matter when or where we were born, are uniformly unyielding.

One must begin the final survey by eliminating the quantity of poets with as yet no quality of their own: the derivative writers. They are always the majority in any generation. The latest group owe most of their inspiration to Eliot and Frost, Millay and Wylie, with Sandburg, Lindsay, Masters, Cummings, Williams and Lowell somewhat in the rear. The younger writers who adhere to free verse, considerably outnumbered by those who do not, have taken Cummings and Williams as their principal models. Then there are the derivative writers who have begun to find themselves—a group to be considered in detail. Then we come to the more original poets—the outstanding men and women of any generation. It may be noted in advance that there is a higher average mastery of craftsmanship than ever before.

I once heard the late Amy Lowell sum up her caustic view by challenging some young Harvard poets: "You write much better than we do, but you have much less to say!" The redoubtable Amy, in the last year of her life, was ready to fight the younger as she had once fought the older generation. Unhappily, her work has had little influence in shaping the course of our later poetry. On the whole, this poetry is not alone accomplished, but it offers another field rich in variety, indicative of new life esthetically sounded. A further interest in the rela-

tion of man to the soil, to his fellow man and to old and fresh cultures, has added to the work of the preceding generation the findings of still another dawn. A general characteristic of the period is its hard, clean nudity of thought and expression—a movement begun but not mastered by the Imagists, except in Pound and H. D. And Pound and H. D., a little too remote from crass existence, reared towers of escape from which the boldest young rebels have fled, back toward existence. This flight was aided, not alone by Eliot, Williams and Cummings, but by the powerful realism of such prose artists as Joyce, Hemingway and Lardner. The "mouths of babes" now discuss matters in print formerly reserved for men in stag parties and smoking cars. Sophistication is the milk of infants; precocity dashes its pen into hard-boiled or intellectual ink. Older fellows may squirm at seeing their private thoughts exposed and envy the honesty and candor of the lads and their lasses. The wiser among the older will see that the youngsters are fighting the national fight in the open: the battle against Puritanism and such offshoots as standardization and prohibition. The offspring of the machine age, of wealthy steamrollers flattening human particles into democratic dust, have the battle decidedly against them. Yet they fight on, minute in numbers and strength compared with the shrewd old giants of Mammon. One removes one's hat, a battered slouch hat, and bids the youngsters onward:

> Not till we grow down to dung,
> each effort of body and spirit
> manure for the next generation,
> will the gods say, "Man, you have sung."

Once more, in view of the number and variety of poets ahead, I have had to arrange them in groups, awkward and by no means arbitrary. One has to guard, more than ever before, against finalities of judgment, since most of these writers are at the beginning of their careers. I have attempted several divisions: a woman's group (always a hateful arrangement), a sectional group, with particular reference to the Southern renascence, a New England group, the young university groups, with

Chicago and Harvard in the lead, two minor groups of foreign poets and humorists, the revival and extension of narrative poetry, and finally, the hard-boiled battalion. The groups are of course elastic; members of one group belong just as clearly to some other division—or to no one division whatever. Over each group hovers an aura of metaphysics. Even the humorists are touched by reveries inherent in almost the entire generation whose doors to the past were opened by Eliot and Elinor Wylie. Most of these poets are more than derivative: they give promise (another hateful word) of outgrowing their derivations. Among the women, I find seventeen names—with others under still other headings. Léonie Adams, Laura Benét, Louise Bogan, Clinch Calkins, Elizabeth Coatsworth, Hilda Conkling and Nathalia Crane (the infant prodigies), Babette Deutsch, Hildegarde Flanner, Elizabeth Hollister Frost, Marjorie Meeker, Kathleen Millay, Virginia Moore, Gladys Oaks, Elizabeth Madox Roberts, Josephine Strongin, Genevieve Taggard. The most distinguished seem to be Adams, Bogan, Calkins, Roberts, Strongin and Taggard, five of whom are metaphysicians. Next in order come Crane, the enfant terrible, Deutsch, the intellectual, and Oaks, the female Swinburne. Miss Benét still owes a little too much to her brothers and to Elinor Wylie. The mesdames Coatsworth, Flanner, Meeker, Millay and Moore, have delicacy, charm and grace, but not enough originality. Mrs. Frost's one book, "The Lost Lyrist," dedicated to her husband's memory, has poignancy and not a little poetry. But much of it is repetitious, and echoes her fellow Rochester poet, Adelaide Crapsey. Mrs. Frost's poems have the virtue of simple ecstasy, as in "Sky Lilies," "White Day," "News" and "Rendezvous."

> One's satisfied with larkspur
> Who has a hand to hold:
> But he who walks in silence
> Is thirsty for the cold
> Touch of the white sky lilies
> The clouds sometimes unfold.

The poems of Hilda Conkling, who was born in 1910 and issued books in 1920 and '22, owe a good deal to her life in a dream-

world and to the reading of excellent poetry—notably the Imagists. They also owe something to her amanuensis, Grace Hazard Conkling, who took down the poems Hilda said aloud and arranged their line-divisions. If I do not share the public enthusiasm for Hilda's girl-songs, it may be due to a congenital prejudice against most juvenile poetry, and a preference for the lives of children recaptured by such adults as Lewis Carroll, Walter de la Mare and especially Miss Roberts. Nor can I smother the impression that the public enthusiasm for the writings of infants is largely an impulse impelled by sentimental wonderment. Hilda is a girl with the normal fancies of an outdoor child; it is absurd to treat her like a precocious specimen. One must consider all poetry in the light of all other poetry, and not make allowances for age or youth. Viewed in this perspective, Hilda's poems take a natural, not a sentimental place in our affection. "Water" is one of the best:

> The world turns softly,
> Not to spill its lakes and rivers.
> The water is held in its arms,
> And the sky is held in the water.
> What is water,
> That pours silver
> And can hold the sky?

I feel a similar wariness toward Nathalia Crane, *ætat* 1913, and the author of five books of verse and a novel or two. Like Hilda, the New York child is endowed with the blood of former artists. According to Untermeyer, Nathalia's father is a descendant of John and Priscilla Alden and a kinsman of Stephen Crane; "on her mother's side she inherits the varied gifts of the Abarbanels, that famous family of Spanish Jews which counts among its members, poets, musicians and ministers of state." At nine, some of her poems were printed in *The New York Sun* by Edward Leamy, and he printed them solely on their merits. "It was not until a call in answer to a letter disclosed to Leamy's amazement that the writer was none other than a slender, candid and not at all self-conscious child." Her first book, "The Janitor's Boy," came out in 1924 and ran

through five editions. A heated controversy ensued. Various leading poets were accused of playing another hoax on the public; and the child's philosophic father was accused of writing or inspiring the poems in a kind of vicarious adventure. Whether the poems were written directly by Nathalia—an omnivorous reader of everything, including encyclopedias—or whether they were written in collaboration, is now beside the point. We may read them as they are and enjoy some astounding adventures. Nathalia's first book, introduced by William Rose Benét, Nunally Johnson and Leamy, is clearly the best of the five rushed into print by her counselors. Except for an occasional poem, the later books grow more and more bookish, far-fetched, obscure. Among the newer notes, one finds a heightened predilection for metaphysics and psychoanalysis. I am completely stumped by the poem on Freud in her recent volume, "Venus Invisible"—a poem several years old:

Every Monday shudder,
  Every Tuesday scare;
Memories of tigers
  Turning round to stare.

Art hops from the babe's bath,
  Shameless even yet.
Mayhap in the Charleston
  Lurks the minuet.

This precocity pursues its new-world candor in the very first volume: in such sophisticated poems as "The Gossip," "Eva," "Old Maid's Reverie," "My Husbands," and the irresistible songs to the janitor's red-headed boy.

Oh, Roger! You were only nine,
  And I was half-past eight;
It really was romantic, or
  As good, at any rate.

What can one say about the poem called "Jealousy," in which the child guards her father against ogling flappers:

Rah! Rah! Flatbush! my mother wasn't there,
But some papas are rather young and need a daughter's care.

The Discoveries of Still Another Dawn

If one's amazement is not complete, it is completed by the metaphysical poems which hark back to Emily Dickinson and reach the hard precision of Elinor Wylie—as in "The Vestal." The same concern with the origin of things, with truth, with the hereafter, is disclosed in the rollicking metres of "The Blind Girl," "Prescience," "The Symbols"—

> In the darkness, who would answer for the color of a rose,
> Or the vestments of the May moth and the pilgrimage it goes.

Where does this diction come from: the poet's vision for the singular word allied to a singular mood or thought? Nathalia's editors assure us that she plays with dolls and writes her poems in secret. We can believe in the janitor's boy and the songs to him, a blending of the real and the romantic—

> He's going to hunt for a desert isle
> In our geography.

All girls study geography—most because they have to—but what girl adds to her history, books on the history of honey, of painting, of pottery, of the dinosaur, of Confucius, of the Talmud, and sets her reading to interpretative verse? Luckily for verisimilitude, the deductions are often fantastic and immature. At other times, they reveal an age-old wisdom. Her love of war and soldiers, of seas and sailing ships, derives from her reading and from the father's reënacted scenes from his own life. He is not only a philosopher, but in Nathalia's poems, an incorrigible playboy who turns the Flatbush home into miniature battlefields. That home and its rooftop and surrounding yards and streets is made most vivid by the girl:

> I linger on the flathouse roof, the moonlight is divine.
> But my heart is all a-flutter like the washing on the line.

Suddenly, in the midst of the appealing commonplace, philosophy emerges, as in "Suffering," which opens with doggerel descriptive of being stung by a bee and closes with the Dickensonian,

> And now I know the tenseness of
> Humiliating pain.

And what are we to make of such grown-up lines as "The Talmud stalks from right to left, a rabbi in a gown—" "Direction counts as nothing when the gods set up a sign—" "And we'll run our counter-gambit to a checkmate in the game—" and so many others? We can only resort to the humorous conclusion of "The First Story":

> The ink was in the baby—he was bound to write a tale;
> So he wrote the first of stories with his little finger-nail.

Even then, one is baffled by the last poem, "My Husbands." Every girl has husbands, every boy has wives, but what kid of nine or ten has ever written the following:

> I hear my husbands marching
> The æons all adown:
> The shepherd boys and princes—
> From cavern unto crown.
>
> I hear in soft recession
> The praise they give to me;
> I hear them chant my titles
> From all antiquity.
>
> But never do I answer,
> I might be overheard;
> Lose Love's revised illusions
> By one unhappy word.
>
> I sit, a silent siren,
> And count my cavaliers;
> The men I wed in wisdom,
> The boys who taught me tears.
>
> To some I gave devotion,
> To some I kinked the knee;
> But there was one old wizard
> Who laid his spells on me.
>
> He showed me like a master
> That one rose makes a gown;
> That looking up to Heaven
> Is merely looking down. . . .

The person or persons—it doesn't matter which—who wrote this poem had genius. I only regret that the whole affair has

suffered so much publicity. The later Miss Crane is not the equal of little Nathalia:

> Oh, cloudy ords
> Of vaporous velveteen;
> Oh, veruled mists
> Loomed in night's Engadine.

Nor do I care for such national and international demonstrations as the Lindbergh poem which won a $500 prize, or the poem for Shakespeare Week. The real poet revives now and then, as in "The Dust":

> Crumpling a pyramid, humbling a rose,
> The dust has its reasons wherever it goes.

"Yielding to nothing," neither does the dust yield to poets who yield to enthusiastic counselors and fulsome popularity. Miss Crane is old enough to work out her own future and pack off her well-meaning friends and critics.

I feel more certainty in the presence of "Under The Tree" by Elizabeth Madox Roberts. Miss Roberts belongs to the Southern group and the Chicago University group to be discussed later. Though her novels have a broader reputation, "Under The Tree" is a miniature novel, a poetic anthology of child life in a small town. The finest book of its kind in our literature, it is uncontaminated by childish fantasy or by the cuteness of adults writing down to children. The events and characters are real, and the language of the lyrics is faithful to the language of youngsters. The interplay of adults and children is similar to the interplay of the gloomy folk of "Spoon River"—with the gloom deleted. Miss Roberts has no thesis to unfold. She is content to recapture her childhood just as it was. She writes, not from above or below, but on a level sensitive to the past. It is impossible to convey the tang of this book through quotation—one has to quote whole poems, and the poems are many. There is never the slightest striving after literary effect. Best of all, one learns what downright realists children are, and how impervious to buncombe. When the circus came to town.

A big wild man was in a cage,
And he had some snakes going over his feet.
And somebody said "He eats them alive!"
But I didn't see him eat.

Though children may wonder more about life than we do, they are often more objective, as in "The Worm." This worm is unearthed in "a piece of clod" dug up by four children who are digging a well. Their original intention is sidetracked as they watch him "pucker up himself and stretch himself to walk away."

His shining skin was soft and wet.
I poked him once to see him squirm.
And then Will said, "I wonder if
He knows that he's a worm."

And then we sat back on our feet
And wondered for a little bit.
And we forgot to dig our wells
Awhile, and tried to answer it.

And while we tried to find it out,
He puckered in a little wad,
And then he stretched himself again
And went back home inside the clod.

That is all—no comment, no irony, no metaphysical implication —just a progression of facts recalling Frost's line: "The fact is the sweetest dream that labor knows."

It is a long step from Hilda, Nathalia and Miss Roberts to Gladys Oaks' "Nursery Rhymes For Children Of Darkness," issued a year ago. This book, along with 944 other manuscripts of first volumes, was entered in a $500 prize-contest which Mrs. Conkling, Max Eastman and I were asked to judge. Among the 933 volumes weeded out by the preliminary judges, there may have been better books than Miss Oaks', but hers was the best among the twelve that came to us. Nearly a thousand manuscripts by poets who had never published a book—the figure is overwhelming. The prize-winning volume is arranged under three headings: "Religion," "Nursery Rhymes," "Kinsmen." The very first reading shows that these poems are in-

tended, not for babes, but for the sophisticated youth of the age of despair and revolt. They were written by a full-blooded iconoclast. There are echoes in the volume, echoes of the fleshly Solomon and Swinburne, and up-to-date revisions of the Christ legend, with Judas as the hero, of Salome, Thais, Sappho and the Magdalene—in love, not with Jesus, but Judas. Some of the lines are deliberately shocking to bourgeois tastes, and mar the poems they inhabit. In the "Nursery Rhymes," the attacks on the weaker sex of the male are forthright and sardonic. The comic Rupert, who is strong and manly by day, is a pitiful fellow who returns to his wife for nightly refreshment. "The Ballad Of Yellow Hair And Red Beard" has a rollicking audacity. On the whole, I prefer the sonnets of the Kinsmen group. The classic form has placed a restraint on the poet's impassioned moods, and molded them into things of strength. The sonnets are mostly portraits of men and women in various stages of the sexual or marital relation. The Roman stoic, whose "vitals freeze to snow and ice," is not as admirable as the Elizabethan who lives every sort of life,

> Looking unshocked at life, finding it good,
> Hard as itself, living it as he would.

"The Philosopher At Forty" is one whom frustration greets in the mirror with the ironic word, "serenity." Another study in frustration deals with an old man who brags about his youth in front of youngsters who pity him. "Eva And Haley" limns a man who wins a woman through pity—"Oh, pitied men are beautiful to women." There is an attack on Anatole France at eighty—"Prometheus has grown old—" and the younger generation lights its fires elsewhere. "Meeting After Five Years" is somewhat à la Millay: the returning suitor is flippantly ejected. "The Ruthless Romantic" is reduced to moonshine by the man who grows potatoes and comes home smelling "of berry leaves, the ground, and rain."

> And how can gentlemen with stars to carry
> Upon their necks love women, whom they marry?

The once golden-limbed Diana is now a woman a man married a thousand years ago:

> She waits for him with clustered children now,
> A faithful woman ageing by a wall.

Even Helen of Troy, who has enjoyed many men before Paris, is a comic figure, though each suitor seemed "the god, the nave, the earth, whose might would leave her drained and satisfied." Can woman "stunt her stars and still her foams?"

> She must. All rebels splendid and soul-numerous
> At last build doors before the woods for homes.

In an "Undedicated Sonnet," after acknowledging that her hatred is over, the poet concludes:

> And now that I am humble, who was proud,
> And know myself not strong nor beautiful,
> Like a great forest which a storm has ploughed
> In spring when trees were green and buds grown full—
> How shall I meet them? How meet whom I love?
> And how meet them I wounded with such skill
> In days when I had bloom and shade to give
> And bees and lions answered to my will?

To her "old, dark friend," Hatred, she cries peace, and embraces wedlock:

> Now only houses in the weary streets
> Where men may hide the thorn trees of their hearts.

We now come to four more or less metaphysical poets: Miss Deutsch, Miss Bogan, Miss Taggard, Miss Adams. Though Miss Deutsch has been writing poetry for a number of years, she is a critic, rather than a poet, by temperament. Most of her poetry has a critical basis. It is admirable in workmanship, but rarely stirs the reader out of his chair. Somehow, the plot of a poem is so carefully prearranged that the reader can anticipate the surprise ending—a characteristic of the poem, "Capriccio," or of the sterling sonnet, "In A Museum." In the octave, people are staring in on the "antique toys whereby men sought to turn the scales of doom." We surmise that the sestet will apply

the dusty lesson to the spectators, and it does so skillfully. There is at least one striking line: "And vanity, the worm that never dies." Poems on death and extinction are always a great temptation—greater now than ever before in our poetry. Miss Deutsch's artistry shows a steady advance in her latest poems, especially in the metaphysical polysyllables of "The Hunt," with its rather majestic march. The poem does not completely free itself from the academic influence of the old metaphysicians, revived by Eliot and Elinor Wylie. The Maine poet, Louise Bogan, who has written comparatively little, is more independent. "Body Of This Death," 1923, is her only volume. The poet's concern with death is primarily the concern of a woman bereft of man's love. Such a title as "Chanson Un Peu Naïve" is delightfully misleading. The poet's naïveté is the essence of subtlety quietly exposed, and her employment of natural symbols more than decorative. Poignant notes are struck with an intellectual restraint poignant in itself. Here is no shattered woman, nor a proud ego suffering, but an artist distilling the throes of flesh and spirit. Women fail in the objectivity reserved by Nature for men: they have "no wilderness . . . they are provident instead," and their love is either "too tense, or too lax."

> They hear in every whisper that speaks to them
> A shout and a cry.
> As like as not, when they take life over their door-sills
> They should let it go by.

"The Alchemist" owes something to Elinor Wylie:

> I burned my life that I might find
> A passion wholly of the mind,
> Thought divorced from eye and bone,
> Ecstasy come to breath alone.

But Miss Bogan's passion is more forthright, less obscure. She gains a largeness of view by comparing a woman who loves "beyond wisdom" to some one now "quiet in the fern"

> Like a thing gone dead and still,
> Listening to the prisoned cricket

Shake its terrible, dissembling
Music in the granite hill.

"Portrait" and "The Changed Woman" come to similar conclusions through different moods and cadences. Everything the changed woman sees is something "she once bore and what she knew she re-learns now." What may happen on earth or in the skies need not trouble her: "Her lids will know them when she dies."

What she has gathered, and what lost,
She will not find to lose again.
She is possessed by time, who once
Was loved by men.

Fire and wisdom have gone into the composition of these lyrics. Latterly, Louise Bogan has applied her artistry to the writing of prose—a regrettable step, unless the prose develop the poetry.

Genevieve Taggard of Waitsburg, Wash., has been writing poetry for the past ten years, and recently issued a small selective volume, "Travelling Standing Still": a tribute to her integrity toward her own work. A member of the University of California group fathered by the genial Bynner, Miss Taggard came East about eight years ago and, with some other young poets, established *The Measure,* a magazine faithful to conservative forms. But the Washington poet is anything but a conservative. In her effort to find an exact likeness for her emotion and thought—a metaphysical ideal—she has invented a number of metrical turns and cadences. The faults she falls into are a result of the difficult medium she works in: at their worst, obscurities and eccentricities. Since she goes in for power, in preference to delicacy, and for universal rather than intimate things, she often reaches too far or not far enough, and does not achieve complete communion with the reader. In short, she is an erratic poet who errs on the side of spaciousness, rather than littleness. I feel that Miss Taggard's best work lies ahead of her, and will always lie ahead—an admirable trait in perspective. She does not devote herself to the much simpler task of perfecting minutiæ. The less than thirty poems she has saved from the past are decidedly varied. There are some in which

woman borrows natural symbols for self-interpretation; others which interpret Hawaiian myths, people and scenes; and others, as in Louise Bogan, wherein woman is shown in love's aftermath. The peace men seek is "poured by poor women out of their heart's poverty, for worn men." This weary note or note of resignation is foreign to Miss Bogan, or to Miss Oaks. As far as Miss Taggard's love poems are concerned, one prefers the imaginative, "With Child." The "slim and languid girl" is no more. "You cleft me with your beauty's pulse, and now your pulse has taken body." "Earth tingles, teeming at my heel!"

> It does not heed our ecstasies, it turns
> With secrets of its own, its own concerns,
> Toward a windy world of its own, toward stark
> And solitary places. In the dark,
> Defiant even now, it tugs and moans
> To be untangled from these mother's bones.

One of Miss Bogan's titles is, "Men Loved Wholly Beyond Wisdom." Miss Taggard has a poem called, "To One Loved Wholly Within Wisdom." The scorn and bitterness in the latter are not present in the former. In this respect, Miss Bogan seems to be the mellower person. But Miss Taggard is in love with storms, tropical and glacial things, and does not seek peace in quietude:

> And since love gets its tempered sense
> From the large fact of altering earth,
> I love the winter, stubborn, dense,
> And love the storm my love is worth.

This brings one to her masterpiece, "Ice Age." She is most at home in the spacious, the purely imaginative. It is a long poem, a little too long, in which varying metres are severely faithful to the varying moods and images. Ultimate extinction of the earth is the main theme of the poem:

> And spider snow will spin and spin
> A tangle of frost to snare earth in.

"Life and color and sound will ebb . . . no sound harsher than snow." Men sing against "the granite fright."

Our Singing Strength

Only singing matters now,
With stark birds on every bough.

"Bravado of sparse breath . . . desperate gaiety and games . . . to keep the cold away."

Not to give in,
Men will go on
Making vague love, kissing wan
Faces. Trying to make
Children with women,
Trying to wake
Hints of old hunger—bitterly break
Flesh that turns marble-hard—trying to take
Life in their arms for their brief comfort's sake.

And the women will touch

Cautiously their children and their lovers—clutch
Anything alive.

But all will go down in "the all-covering snow."

Even the evening and the morning laid
Cheek to cheek, will fade . . .

Léonie Adams, the most distinguished of the younger women poets, carries Miss Taggard's cosmic urge to the farthest extremes—without losing her balance. "Those Not Elect," 1925, is an unusual first volume, though it owes a bit of its inspiration to classic metaphysicians. The Brooklyn mystic is a comparatively difficult poet by virtue of her devotion to the reflections of the mind over matter. Her exquisite psyche, aware of the inconsequence of man in eternity, ventures among problems abstruse to the average mind; but she molds her thought into concrete images. She rarely relaxes the high tension of her inquiry; there are no banal, and few colloquial lines along the way. No poem is commonplace; and a poem which requires several readings rewards the additional effort. Each demands concentrated attention, demands an other-worldliness of the worldly reader. He must resign whatever he is to these ecstasies. "April Mortality," printed in *The New Republic*, brought immediate fame to Miss Adams—fame she has refused to pursue.

The Discoveries of Still Another Dawn

Rebellion shook an ancient dust,
And bones bleached dry of rottenness
Said: Heart, be bitter still, nor trust
The earth, the sky, in their bright dress.

April may lure the mind to dreams of permanence, but

'Tis the old cheating of the sun,
The intricate lovely play of sense.

In "Thought's End," "the traitorous east" is extinguished by the night that sweeps "the circle of my seeing bare."

I felt at being's rim all being fail,
And my one body pitted against space.

She advises her heart to "be self no more." "Stars that are worlds look out and see you not." She is constantly fascinated by the night, by the spacious, and by the littleness even of the earth. The pity on earth which Hardy considered the one consoler of human tragedy in the face of the implacable, is found by Miss Adams in the physical light of the heavens. This is as far as hope is admitted into her austere system.

O bosom carven upon the roses and pleasures,
Heaven cannot unlock your passions and your mirth,
But have you not perceived those eyes mournful and bright,
How you are cherished by the countenance of the skies,
Is it not much, O earth?

This, to be sure, is giving the stars a personal interpretation, a feminine turn: a flaw in an objective system.

The later poems reach even greater heights and depths. "Twilit Revelation" is superb in thought and imagery. The night descends again on the "poor brief, poor melting star," and has this effect on lovers:

And these rich-bodied hours of our delight
Show like a moth-wing's substance when the fall
Of confine-loosing, blue unending night
Extracts the spirit of this temporal.
So space can pierce the crevice wide between
Fast hearts, skies deep-descended intervene.

What a magic image and mastery of speech! The later Elizabethans have found a true descendant in Léonie Adams, and so have modern scientists. The only real hope, as with Miss Taggard, is in song—vide "Bell Tower"—a statement I have to revise by adding that the body of Miss Adams' verse is never despairing. Hers is a full-blooded acceptance of the facts of human existence, a heartiness no doubt due to the fact that Miss Adams can sing. The frantic oak goes down in sundown, but "the live gold leaks beyond, and matter's sanctified, dipped in a gold stain." And the bell tower can "fill the sky to beat on an airy shell." Marcel Proust, near the close of an active social life, found a sole refuge in art. So does the youthful Miss Adams. She sees a boat sailing a river in the meadows. It moves in a trance, or is "a thing the helmsman dreamed."

> They said it would carry no traveler,
> But the vessel would go down,
> If a heart were heavy-winged,
> Or the bosom it dwelt in, stone.

How tremendous the hesitation before the final tone! What is the human heart and what can it do or learn?

> And in a thicket passed me by,
> In the black brush a running hare,
> Having a spectre in his eye,
> That sped in darkness to the snare;
> And who but I can know in pride,
> The heart set beating in the side
> Has but the wisdom of a hare?

Such lines are typical of the courage and candor of the younger generation. They are determined to bury romanticism and to raise the intellect above the heart. These may be signs of a new romanticism, and the will to submerge the ego and exalt the cosmos may be a step in advance of further individuality. The ego of the human species is your truest chameleon, and objectivity one of its most subjective shades.

Clinch Calkins and Josephine Strongin have just begun publishing poetry, the former in a book called "Poems," the latter in

The American Caravan. Neither the one nor the other is a child of the age of despair or of resignation, but a negative and a positive fighting spirit. Miss Calkins' work is a defiant reaction against the present or most recent age of which, apparently, Miss Strongin takes no account whatever. Her joyous songs, written at sixteen and seventeen, may be harbingers of the new youth just ahead and of the next movement in American poetry. Her exultation, in which several other youngsters share, is exhilarating to a man who sees so many drooping spirits among men in their twenties. Though Miss Calkins is a tragic writer, she is a bellicose tragedienne. Pride and scorn are her principal weapons. She seeks "no healing, comfort or reprieve," and feels that divinity lies "in unshuddering sight." Her book is inscribed to her father, a kingly person:

> Your precept was, Shrink not from day or night,
> For nothing wrong there is, and nothing right.

She prays the Lord to spare man from kindness,

> Wear for him no thorn,
> Save him with scorn.

Nor should woman "lie down to rest" in "the arms of grief." When it comes to dying, the poet will go flying on a mare—

> Running the miles until my knees lose hold
> And I shall lie quite limp beside a wall—
> My horse too far away to hear me fall.

Beside such lines, one reads the lines of certain young males, and wonders why the knightly virtues are now ridden by females. Miss Calkins has the power of a dauntless old warrior, and yet she is utterly feminine. In "Suffocation," she bids the Lord to shake her as a lion:

> Be thou too quick for me to give thee battle
> And end my strangulation with a rattle!

She is in love with "harlot Death" who betrayed her bed:

> What ravishment steels me to lash and scars?
> What ecstasy, what more than martyr's zeal,

Grief and pity being done, to love the ordeal
That stretches me upon a rack of stars?

She even scorns self-protection; builds "no moats or turrets," but dreams in a "sacred tower,"

Haughty and proud, alone but unafraid,
Possessing nothing: by no loss dismayed.

Miss Calkins is a fiery metaphysician superior to the agonies of the flesh. Miss Strongin's feeling for the cosmos is not a studied system, as it is in young metaphysicians who read life, not by the sun but the lamp. She is intuitive and joyous, and her wisdom an interplay between baring oneself to Nature and letting Nature have her will. The girl's first published poems are dithyrambs made of undulating lines, partly rhymed. Her technical media are not yet flawless, but at least they are natural. Here is the opening stanza of a poem in mounting images delineating the oneness of a child and Nature:

Child—in all the flying sky,
that is your friend
because some flying oneness in yourself
rides rushing high,
do you see the waning bird,
that is your friend
because some straining bird-heart in your being
beats and sails and pains
and slashes height—and wanes?
Child—down all the grown, old mountains,
that are your friends
because some found, whole knowledge in you,
glides immovably beneath the moving sky,
do you find the settled, seeking trees,
that are your friends
become some feathery, rooted thing in you,
sways and breaks and dies,
and lives along your mountains,
and stands black against your skies?

The chant unfolds a recrudescence of Emerson's pantheism. After her first free poems, Miss Strongin ventured on a course in esthetic self-discipline and returned from a summer seaside

with a sheaf of sonnets. The editors of the *Caravan* placed a group of five at the head of their second volume. The sequence is a challenge to Death, a challenge aware of the enemy's power:

> Tell Death to fly and tell him to be fleet!
> I will lend being to Nothing and will raise
> Armies of Nights—battalions of all days,
> Ships of each minute—Fleets of hours: defeat
> This enemy, this Death, if once we meet!

The second sonnet is a lullaby to Death; the third begs Life to "drop me—leave me—lose me—let me stop!" The fourth bids the powers of Nature likewise cease; but the fifth returns to the battlefield:

> The cities clash their arms and raise their shout.
> What are their spires pointing to through Space?
> Even the heart of Death? And does Death's face
> Turn pale as crowded planets build off out
> Into the night with light and sound? Does doubt
> Shake at his mind's door? Will we hear him pace
> Over his Universal floor? Will fear
> Knock at his dark heart? Will his rapid eye
> Turn from the world's and seek the filling sky?
> (Where is escape, Death!) Will he steeply hear
> Our coming? Will he watch us drawing near?
> Will he turn faint and tremble? Will he die!
>
> The cities rise. Will Death unstartled fold
> All of them in his close and fatal hold?

The girl knows enough to bring in this last question and to leave it unanswered. . . .

Going back a few years and considering some older figures, we touch the most recent renascence in American poetry: the Southern renascence. Just about the time the prophetic Mencken blew into his blunderbuss and pronounced the South a "Sahara of the Beaux Arts," the new movement stole the nation's attention from the Middle-West. Mencken's blunders are always delightful: they ought to be run in columns parallel

to his *American Mercury* Americana. The renascence outside of Baltimore brought not alone poets, but the novelists, James Branch Cabell, T. S. Stribling, Julia Peterkin, Frances Newman, and the playwright, Paul Green—to mention a few. Confining ourselves to poetry and bearing in mind the earlier effort of Aiken and Fletcher, we find that the renascence first matured in old Charleston, thanks to the energies of DuBose Heyward, and a Pennsylvanian located there: Hervey Allen. Though neither had the poetic stature of Aiken and Fletcher, they had something else: a visionary practicality which helped in the birth or development of the poetry societies in Charleston, Savannah, New Orleans, Baltimore and elsewhere, and also encouraged critics and propagandists. From Colonial days onward, Southerners have been excellent publicists. The work of the modest Heyward in the field of persuasion has noble qualities. Latterly, his poetry has gone into the racy prose of "Porgy" and "Mamba's Daughters." Like the Kentuckian, Miss Roberts, his novels overshadow his verse. Nor can one say that the Charleston group, though it also contains Josephine Pinckney, is quite on a par with the group Simms gathered about him. Timrod still remains the outstanding poet of the city by the sea. A town farther West has developed a richer group than the Charlestonians: the Fugitives of Nashville, Tenn., with such poets and critics as John Crowe Ransom, Robert Penn Warren, Donald Davidson, Allen Tate, Laura Riding. The New Orleans group, though it produced that venturesome magazine, *The Double Dealer*, and housed such poets as the lyrical Oklahoman, John McClure (according to Mencken, our greatest poet), and the pungent epigrammatist, Richard R. Kirk, has not lived up to its early promise. There are also Virginian groups, with headquarters in Norfolk and Charlottesville, and other minor groups in other communities. The Southwest is somewhat akin to the South, with Texas and Oklahoma leading the way with societies and periodicals. Texas has developed better playwrights than poets, thanks to the pioneer Hinsdell of the Dallas Little Theatre; while Oklahoma is distinguished for the group of young writers at the University, most of them playwrights and prose

men. There is still another Southern phase, a profound renascence in itself: the Negro advance, led by such poets as James Weldon Johnson, Jean Toomer, Claude McKay, Countée Cullen, Langston Hughes. Over the broad area, I have to confine myself to salient characteristics and prominent names, and leave a more detailed survey to the reader. He may find a completer record in "The Advancing South," by Edwin Mims. My main concern is with Charleston, Nashville and the dark race.

Seven years ago, working in collaboration, Heyward and Allen produced an "epoch-making book"—"Carolina Chansons." According to a preface, the authors attempted to revive the legends of the once "feudal civilization" whose aristocracy and slaves have departed "with the economic system upon which it rested." "Early colonial discovery and romance" and "memories of war and reconstruction" have been coupled with "the semi-tropical landscape of the Low Country, which somehow lends them all a pensively melancholy yet fitting background." The book is successful in recapturing the dreamy past, but lacks the intensity of a first-hand experience. The poems about old days have loveliness and charm, but those about the present are more convincing. The legends, the poems about pirates, Indians, Lafayette, are too smooth, too accurate, too carefully modeled. The local and historical fail to grow universal. There is a sameness in the methods of the collaborators: one cannot tell them apart. I prefer the poems on Charleston: "Silences" and "Dusk" (D. H.), "Palmetto Town" (H. A.), and the modern portraits: "Upstairs Downstairs" and "Beyond Debate" (H. A.). In the sonnet, "Upstairs Downstairs," the judge "who lives impeccably upstairs" has the servants in to family prayers, "and edifies *his* soul with exhortations." A stranger makes an inadvertent remark—"before we paralyzed him with our pity—"

> Saying the black man living with the white
> Had given more than white men could requite.

The conservative old city finds a true voice in the leisurely, picturesque verse of Heyward. When he says his songs belong to her, and that he belongs to her too, he tells a truth he has devel-

oped with greater power and beauty in "Porgy." His one book of poems, "Skylines And Horizons," has more than a hint of this growth. "A Yoke Of Steers" is equal to the best of Joaquin Miller.

> There is a power here that grips the mind;
> A force repressed and inarticulate,
> Slow as the swing of centuries, as blind
> As destiny, and as deliberate.
>
> They will arrive in their appointed hour
> Unhurried by the goad of lesser wills,
> Bearing vast burdens on.
> *They are the great*
> *Unconquerable spirit of these hills.*

Hervey Allen, after spending five years in Charleston, returned to the North, and has been wandering about in various places. His restless spirit and inquiring vision emerged in "Earth Moods," 1925, a cosmic book on the whole. He quotes Thomas Hardy: "The time seems near, if it has not actually arrived, when the chastened sublimity of a moor, a sea, or a mountain will be all of nature that is absolutely in keeping with the moods of the more thinking among mankind." But Hardy, at the heart of his Wessex hermitage, never lost track of his neighbors: they are always an integral part of his infinite landscapes. In most of Allen's sagas and epics, though people participate, they seem mere shadows on the scene. They have an historic rather than an actual tone; one cannot get hold of them. There are splendid descriptions of Nature, vivid lines and verses—the work, it would seem, of a man more in love with the vast than with minute beings. In a poem, "Old Meadows," he declares: "We miss the miracle of usual things—" and I miss it in most of his poetry. In the fantastic poem, "Whim Alley,"—"Whim Alley once led into Danger Court—" he concludes:

> Whim Alley leads to less than nothing now,
> For only shadows dwell in Danger Court.

I sincerely trust I am not unfair to Allen. He can write major things and will—if he ever shakes himself free of the moods and mirages of fantasy.

Josephine Pinckney, though not as good a poet as the Carolina collaborators, has drawn a finer impression of Charleston, in "Sea-Drinking Cities." Most of her poems are descriptive or decorative; yet the book contains fine portraits of aristocrats and slaves: "Wounded Woman," "Hag," "Gulla Lullaby," "Peggy Considers Her Grandmothers," "On The Shelf," "In The Barn," "The Misses Poar Drive To Church." These proud old spinsters, sailing abroad in their victoria, are still a daily spectacle in the one American city wholly loyal to tradition. The scene of the poem goes back sixty years:

> Neatly darned are their black mitts,
> And straight each stately sister sits.
> Their carriage-dresses, brushed and steamed,
> Cover their decent limbs; they seemed
> No finer, really, before the War
> When money was free in the house of Poar.
> The negro coachman in beaver hat,
> Slightly nibbled by moth and rat,

is fully as proud as he drives the "elegant equipage" now yoked to a yoke of oxen.

> (They've had no horses since sixty-four
> When the Yankees stopped at the house of Poar.)

Sunk in the "square front pew," the Poars listen to the parson, until he invokes a blessing for the President of these States.

> Then, knowing full well that Heaven can't
> Expect them to pray for General Grant—

they bury their high noses "in dear Great-grand-papa's prayer-book," with its "urbane petitions to guard the Crown against seditions."

> Not that they hold King Charles so dear,
> Although their blood is Cavalier,
> But it suits their piety, on the whole,
> Better to pray for the Restoration
> Than the overseer of a patch-work nation.

The Fugitive is the most vigorous and varied of the new Southern groups—qualities due to the superior intellectual fibre

of the Tennesseans. Most of its members were undergraduates or instructors in the Vanderbilt University whose English department is headed by Edwin Mims. A comprehensive survey was issued last year in the "Fugitive Anthology"—poems selected from successive issues of a magazine that was born in '22 and disbanded in '25—a long enough life for any fine experiment. "Originally there were seven friends" who met intermittently and "talked about poetry and philosophy." *The Fugitive* was started "as a coöperative undertaking. . . . There was no editor. Poems were chosen by ballot" and pen-names affixed. Ultimately, the true names were revealed. Those which were soon fairly well-known were Davidson, Ransom and Tate; to these we now add Miss Riding and Warren; and to these we may have to add Merrill Moore. So far, these six poets carry the most distinction, with Ransom well in the lead. He is a thoroughly independent writer; so, in a lesser degree, are Miss Riding and Moore. Miss Riding is the eccentric of the group, one of the maddest of Americans. Recently, she sailed for London and joined Robert Graves in a wholesale onslaught on the modern camps of poetry. Merrill Moore, who has just published his first book, has taken audacious liberties with the dear old sonnet. I should like to call them free-verse sonnets. Enthusiasm is the keynote to his muse:

> When he returned enthusiasm burned
> Within his breast. Enthusiasm churned
> His heart and head. Enthusiasm bled
> Him whiter than a sheet. Enthusiasm
> Beat him here and there and whirled a spasm
> Through the trembling tower of his head.

And when he is home, enthusiasm has conquered "Hell, Lucifer, Peter, Heaven, and Chaos as well!" And also the present writer, another chronic enthusiast.

This interjection also accounts for the lack of warmth I feel toward the work of Davidson and Tate—accomplished critics, as well as poets. The poetry of Davidson (vide "The Tall Men"), written almost entirely in an undeviating blank verse, has humane qualities that make Tennessee vivid to the senses,

not to the passions. Like Heyward and Allen, he is versed in the past and recreates it with skill and intelligence. But the poems sound like harmonious essays rather than poetry. I prefer the blundering heart of Merrill Moore. For still other reasons, I prefer it to the high-power intellect of Allen Tate, a brilliant young critic who recently descended on New York with the old Civil War in his eye. He found plenty of imaginary Northern enemies (whether they fought in the war or not) and demolished or tried to demolish poets inimical to his taste. Not even the once accredited prince, T. S. Eliot, has escaped the logically worded wrath of the Nashville knight. Tate's latest prince is Hart Crane; and from imitating Eliot, he has turned to imitating the youthful Clevelander. Luckily for thin-skinned New Yorkers, the Guggenheims have shipped Tate abroad for two years. Before sailing, he issued two volumes: "Mr. Pope," a collection of poems, and "Stonewall Jackson," a biography. He is now engaged on the life of Jefferson Davis. Pope used to be the principal model of American poetry. He has now returned via Eliot, Dryden, Donne and the metaphysicians. Eliot, in writing about wit, has called Dryden, "the great master of contempt," Pope, "the great master of hatred," Swift, "the great master of disgust." Tate, like the Mississippi Bodenheim, seems to unite all three—in petto. He goes into tempests over literary teacups, when he ought to shoot his fine energies at bigger game. He has poetic talent and a critical genius of which he has given demonstrations. He has written some excellent, though partly derivative poems: "Idiot," "Procession," "Ode To The Confederate Dead." This is the last stanza of "Mr. Pope":

> What requisitions of a verity
> Prompted the wit and rage between his teeth
> One cannot say. Around a crooked tree
> A moral climbs whose name should be a wreath.

One may draw the same moral for Allen Tate if he ever permits his antipathies to reach the grandiose proportions of the poetry of Alexander Pope—hunchback and prince of his era.

So far as I know, Robert Penn Warren has not yet published

a book. Each time one reads a new poem of his, the poet looms higher. Though he is still another metaphysician in a land now dense with such thinkers, Warren has a grip on the soil and sounds less bookish than his fellows. The two poems of "Kentucky Mountain Farm" have crude power and hard strength. The sonnet sequence, "Images On The Tomb," is partly influenced by Eliot, partly by Webster and Donne. But there are fine variations on the old-new theme, and such lines as, "Blood may not shake the sculptured flesh again—" "The pageantry of thoughts unreconciled—" "The beat of bloody feet on the wet hard stone." "The Wrestling Match" owes something to Hemingway's prizefights, but the gladiators, Mug Hill and the Battling Pole, are treated polysyllabically and interpreted metaphysically. The polysyllabic "Crœsus In Autumn" has a human appeal by virtue of its central figure, a tramp on a village bench, a "gray guy" not unrelated to Aurelius.

> The seasons down our country have a way
> To stir the bald and metaphysic skull . . .

therefore the poet concludes:

> So haul your careful carcass home, old fellow,
> More Roman than the doddering emperor
> Now green is blown and every gold gone sallow.

There are delightful poems to the Warren mother and father, but these are outdistanced by a recent poem, "Grandfather Gabriel." Latterly, Warren has mixed the metaphysical with the physical. His references to the flesh are frankly salacious, and in keeping with the highest tenets of hard-boiled literature. Grandfather Gabriel, who has "rallied and whored and ginned with the best," married Grandmother Martha "in a white wedding gown." Gabriel pronounces their son "a fine little bastard,"

> But Martha lay in a strict high bed,
> No breath to her body or trouble in her head.

"Pondy Woods" is a Tennessee ballad in which "a slick black buck," Jim Todd, is pursued by a buzzard who attacks his con-

science with metaphysics, but—"Nigger, your breed ain't metaphysical." More recently, Saville Clark of Mississippi, a graduate of Vanderbilt, has gone Warren one better in the matter of cursing and swearing. He is a corporal in the U. S. Marine Corps, and has written a poem in anagrams, "Corporal Trim," which is hard to quote in public.

I find myself rather bedazzled and befuddled by the muse of Laura Riding, well though I know and pay tribute to what I can make of Gertrude Stein. Miss Riding, along with many another, is indebted to the lady of the rue de Fleurus. Not the least of the debtors, strange though it may seem, is Ernest Hemingway, who must have read a story of Miss Stein's, "Melanctha," published over twenty years ago—the most remarkable Negro tale I have ever read. That tale, like most of her subsequent tales, is based on a kind of speech-ritual which other writers have borrowed and developed in their own fashion. Hemingway has simplified and clarified the ritual, and is therefore more popular than Miss Stein. Laura Riding is another writer of ritual. Whether she is a genius, an eccentric or a dilettante, I am as yet unable to determine. The poem called, "The Simple Line," is simple only in the title; and the poem called, "Loss Of Reason," is a love poem. The author declares she has a "jokeless modern mind," that she laughs and does not laugh, that to say "I love you" says "the impossible 'I live' and 'I am dead.'" In "Up A Tree," writing is vividly described as "the deaf-and-dumb handtrick of men." Miss Riding's poetry has meaning as well as style. But "The Quids" are a little beyond me—though I have a notion that we are once again in the banal presence of the mortality of man and immortality of God. Here is the second stanza:

> The quids, that had never done anything before
> But be, be, be, be, be,
> The quids resolved to predicate
> And dissipate in a little grammar.
> Oh, the Monoton didn't care,
> For whatever they did—
> The Monoton's contributing quids—
> The Monoton would always remain the same.

A little later we learn that quids are "metaphysical acrobats" who turn themselves inside out—express themselves, as it were—and that,

> Being in, being in, being always in
> Where they never could get out,

they derive from the Monoton, that "felt itself differently the same in its different parts." The poet advises trees and worms to indulge the same quidian exercise; and so should we, who like Miss Riding, are so many active verbs "of the quid's masquerade." *Quid pro quo* is all I can retaliate in so youthful a game of tag.

John Crowe Ransom, the oldest of the Fugitives, was born in Pulaski, Tenn., the birthplace of the Ku Klux Klan. He was clearly the most brilliant member of the now disbanded group, a brilliancy possibly due to his Scotch-Irish ancestry. His work is sometimes marred by an over-demonstration of his enormous erudition. But Ransom is a generous poet who never restrains his exuberance. His wit and gaiety handle many a tragic theme as if tragedy were the right food for comedy—as it is in the mind of an equillibrist. This man of forty is somewhat akin to Nietzsche's joyous Zarathustra. Looking elsewhere for similes, one may liken him to a thoroughbred. He races along at a record-breaking pace, and the reader who hopes to ride him needs courage and skill for such a saddle. This poetry, except for an indebtedness to Browning, Eliot and Stevens, and to the everlasting metaphysicians, is original stuff and—yes, nonsense. Like any balanced philosopher, Ransom, wide-awake to the twinship of wisdom and folly, plays Jaques and Touchstone with equal gusto. And as every cultivated Southerner is a descendant of rhetoricians, his song is a gorgeous tapestry. People in human and inhuman situations, relations and irrelations, are the principal actors. Ransom, like Robinson, is a balladist with an eye and ear for lyric drama. He has published three books: "Poems About God," "Chills And Fever," "Two Gentlemen In Bonds." The second is better than the first and the third even better than the second. The man who tries to pick and choose par-

ticular poems faces an unenviable task. Nor can one emasculate the poems for quotation. They are as unsusceptible to this method as are the poems of Marianne Moore. I can only refer the reader to the books themselves—books which have received virtually no attention from people who continue to rush to inferior poetry.

Though some of Ransom's poetry is autobiographical, self-control reins in the dashing lines of the love poems. "Winter Remembered" is a beauty. Four stanzas reveal a heart lonely for somebody absent—to put the matter baldly. The fifth closes on an astonishing image, a touch of detached humor:

> Dear love, these fingers that had known your touch,
> And tied our separate forces first together,
> Were ten poor idiot fingers not worth much,
> Ten frozen parsnips hanging in the weather.

The effect is similar to the distended "warty squashes" in a poem by Stevens. Both men are poet-philosophers and both love sophisticated exaggeration. "Fall Of Leaf" resembles a Robinsonian dialogue between estranged lovers. Ransom fondles the theme on several occasions and handles it with exquisite appreciation. "Chills And Fever" gets its title from the death of a noble lady. The poet attacks the tragic theme with characteristic wit and virtuosity:

> Here lies a lady of beauty and high degree.
> Of chills and fever she died, of fever and chills,
> The delight of her husband, her aunts, an infant of three,
> And of medicos marvelling sweetly on her ills.

And she died "after six little spaces of chill, and six of burning." In the mooted matter of Heaven and Hell, the poet champions the devils and sufferers below. At times, he resembles Browning, as in "April Treason," "Grandgousier," "Emily Hardcastle"; and more frequently Eliot, as in "Epitaph" and "On The Road To Wockensutter."

> Brady had little Latin and less Greek,
> Not his to verify the obscure quotation,

But Brady knew, no waterfall nor creek
Nor arctic tremor stayed his oxidation.

"Plea In Mitigation" is a self-portrait in defense of Ransom's culture and iconoclasm:

You have heard something muttered in my scorn:
"A little learning addleth this man's wit,
He crieth on our dogmas, Counterfeit!
And no man's bubble 'scapeth his sharp thorn."

The poet admits bringing hurt to his sweet kin, to his scholars, "the young simple snails," and explains his apparent dereliction:

Anatomy, that doled my dubious features,
Had housed within me, close to my breastbone,
My dæmon, always clamoring, Up, Begone,
Pursue your gods faster than most of creatures!

If he is an alien at odds with his generation, he has a refuge: "A seven of friends exceeds much multitude—" the seven founders of *The Fugitive.*

The third book is the mature book of the three: Ransom has fully achieved his own style. "Vision By Sweetwater," "Piazza Piece," "Miller's Daughter," "Parting Without A Sequel," "In Mr. Minnit's House," "Janet Waking," "Puncture," "Two In August," "Jack's Letter," "Survey Of Literature," "The Equillibrists," are poems deserving extended comment. Here are fantasies, whimsies, grotesques, love poems, portraits, drolleries, nonsense—but I have to confine myself to the purely tragic things, things beneath the skin of comedy. "Janet Waking" opens like a nursery rhyme (what beautiful things his child-poems are!). Child Janet goes in search of "her dainty-feathered hen, to see how it had kept." She is too small to understand that the fowl is dead; the nonsense turns to—

And weeping fast as she had breath
Janet implored us, "Wake her from her sleep!"
And would not be instructed in how deep
Was the forgetful kingdom of death.

"Puncture" is a magnificent war-poem, disclosing the horror of a trench with light velocity, and touching a memorable veteran

and comrade in old Grimes—who has a puncture in his side. "Two In August" is a deftly devastating study of two who have begun to quarrel—"with individual tigers in their blood."

> In spring's luxuriant weather had the bridal
> Transpired, nor had the growing parts been idle,
> Nor was it easily dissolved;
> Therefore they tugged but were still intervolved,
> With pain prodigious. The exploit was suicidal.

"The Equillibrists," an even more moving ballad, presents two lovers who burn hot and cold between sin and honor, Heaven and Hell. "Ah! the strict lovers, they are ruined now!" the poet rages and turns impassioned moralist:

> Would you ascend to Heaven and bodiless dwell?
> Or take your bodies honorless to Hell? . . .
>
> Great lovers lie in Hell, the stubborn ones
> Infatuate of the flesh upon the bones;
> Stuprate, they rend each other when they kiss;
> The pieces kiss again—no end to this.

But the lovers cling to their nice orbits, and the moralist is forced to dig them a tomb and "memorize their doom" in an epitaph. Turning back to comedy, wit and satire, "Amphibious Crocodile," though it resembles Eliot's "Hippopotamus," is far more entertaining, and details the adventures of an American globe-trotter. If there is any other key to Ransom's aristocratic muse, the poet supplies it in "Survey Of Literature":

> God have mercy on the sinner
> Who must write with no dinner,
>
> No gravy and no grub,
> No pewter and no pub,
>
> No belly and no bowels,
> Only consonants and vowels. . . .

The renascence or poetic birth of the dark race is not confined to the South, nor to any one locale. Of late, it has settled on Manhattan Island with headquarters in Negro Harlem. There have been a number of surveys and anthologies of Aframerican

poetry. The most recent and most comprehensive is Cullen's "Caroling Dusk." One must repeat in advance that this poetry, like any poetry, must be judged solely on its own merits. The white man's Negro sentiment has no place in objective criticism, nor has he any reason to segregate American Negro poetry. Reflecting on the dark race as a group is purely a convenience. Happily, esthetic leaders among the race, from James Weldon Johnson to Cullen, have shown the relation of dark speech to the English language we have all inherited. The youthful Cullen writes: "While I do not feel that the work of these writers conforms to anything that can be called the Negro school of poetry, neither do I feel that their work is varied to the point of being sensational; rather is theirs a variety within a uniformity that is trying to maintain the higher traditions of English verse—" and of American. "The poet writes out of his experience, whether it be personal or vicarious, and as these experiences differ among other poets, so do they differ among Negro poets." This is scientific analysis, owing part of its inspiration to the pioneer effort of the veteran Johnson. Cullen wisely subtitles his collection, "An Anthology of Verse by Negro Poets." The sparseness of dialect verse, especially among young contemporaries, is significant. Johnson accounts for the decline of dialect: "Although the dialect is the exact instrument for voicing certain traditional phases of Negro life, it is, and perhaps by that very exactness, a quite limited instrument . . . with but two complete stops, pathos and humor. . . . What the colored poet in the United States needs to do is something like what Synge did for the Irish; he needs to find a form that will express the racial spirit by symbols from within rather than by symbols from without—such as the mere mutilation of English spelling and pronunciation." Most present-day poetry in Negro dialect is being dashed off by white cartoonists and sentimentalists.

Cullen's anthology opens naturally with Paul Lawrence Dunbar—though it might have opened with Phyllis Wheatley. The book moves along in chronological order from the oldest poet,

Joseph S. Cotter, Sr., born in 1861, to Lula Lowe Weeden, born eleven years ago. William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, the dynamic editor of *The Crisis,* and William Stanley Braithwaite, anthologist to all races, are among the veterans; and to these may be added Angelina Weld Grimké, Anne Spencer and Mary Effie Lee Newsome. Fenton Johnson, the first radical poet, was born in 1888. Among the thirties, we come to Jessie Fauset, Georgia Douglas Johnson, Claude McKay, Jean Toomer, Frank Horne. The second half of the book is devoted to the younger generation, and it includes the busiest and in some respects the best group of poets: Sterling A. Brown, Langston Hughes, Arna Bontemps, Countée Cullen, Waring Cuney, Helene Johnson. The oldest poets, with the exception of the first Johnson, belong to sentimental traditions. They write with charming accomplishment, but their work now sounds passé. One can escape redundancy and confusion by concentrating on the outstanding poets: James Weldon, Fenton and Helene Johnson, McKay, Toomer, Brown, Hughes, Bontemps, Cullen, Cuney and Miss Weeden. Little Lula Lowe may not be the equal of Hilda Conkling and Nathalia Crane, but she has written an excellent text in—

> Have you ever seen the moon
> And stars stick together?
> Have you ever seen it?
> Have you ever seen bad?
> Have you ever seen good
> And bad stick together?
> Have you ever seen it?

I'd like to say no and I'd like to say yes if I knew which is which, Lula Lowe.

James Weldon Johnson's "God's Trombones," containing Negro sermons in verse, is based on the inspired exhortations of old-time itinerant preachers. The book is a tour de force in human scholarship and poetic interpretation: the early shepherds of the race move by with a majestic stride. The preface is an invaluable essay in documentation. It was through the preacher

"that the people of diverse languages and customs from diverse parts of Africa and thrown into slavery were given their first sense of unity and solidarity. . . . This power . . . is still a vital force; in fact, it is still the greatest single influence among the colored people. . . . The Negro to-day is, perhaps, the most priest-governed group in the country." To this, one might add, that the piety of the Negro is perhaps the most joyous in Christendom. And it is mixed, as we know from the glorious spirituals, with buffoonery, grotesquerie and humor—blessed concomitants. The seven recreated sermons are "The Creation," "The Prodigal Son," "Go Down Death," "Noah Built The Ark," "The Crucifixion," "Let My People Go," "The Judgment Day." Some conclude with an address to the sinful members of the parish. Johnson is to be congratulated on the simplicity of speech and rhythm and the perfect rendition of the folklore inherent in the sermons. The finest is the funeral sermon, "Go Down Death," in which God, moved by the demise of Sister Caroline in Yamacraw, calls for Death and "his pale, white horses." They bring Caroline to "the Great White Throne" and "the loving breast of Jesus."

For some reason, Fenton Johnson of Chicago vanished from the scene after publishing promising books about twelve years ago. I like best his poems in free verse, "African Nights," though they are technically deferential to Sandburg and Masters. Such portraits as "Aunt Hannah Jackson," "Aunt Jane Allen," "The Drunkard," "The Minister," "The Banjo Player," should have been extended across the whole Black Belt. The impassioned bitterness of "Tired" is typical of Johnson, and of other left-wing Negroes:

> I am tired of work; I am tired of building up
> somebody else's civilization.
> Let us take a rest, M'Lissy Jane.
> I will go down to the Last Chance Saloon, drink a gallon or two of gin, shoot a game or two of dice and sleep the rest of the night on one of Mike's barrels.
> You will let the old shanty go to rot, the white people's clothes turn to dust, and the Calvary Baptist Church sink to the bottomless pit. . . .

> Throw the children into the river; civilization has given us too many. It is better to die than it is to grow up and find out that you are colored. . . .

The same scornful note is present in the writer of perfect sonnets, Claude McKay, a former member of *The Liberator* staff. McKay has published two books of poems, "Songs Of Jamaica" (where he was born) and "Harlem Shadows." The poetry is sombre and musical, but it is surpassed by the novels he now writes. The first four lines of the sonnet on America limn McKay's spirit:

> Although she feeds me bread of bitterness,
> And sinks into my throat her tiger's tooth,
> Stealing my breath of life, I will confess
> I love this cultured hell that tests my youth!

Jean Toomer is one of the finest artists among the dark people, if not the finest. He ranks with Eric Walrond in the sheer objectivity of his stories (vide "Cane"), stories which have superseded Toomer's poetry. A philosopher and psychologist by temperament, the Washington writer is now fascinated by the larger, rather than the parochial interests of the human race, and should some day compose a book in the grand manner. The few poems he has written are purely naturalistic. "Reapers" is a complete picture, unspoiled by moral commentary:

> Black reapers with the sound of steel on stones
> Are sharpening scythes. I see them place the hones
> In their hip-pockets as a thing that's done,
> And start their silent swinging, one by one.
> Black horses drive a mower through the weeds,
> And there, a field rat, startled, squealing bleeds,
> His belly close to ground. I see the blade,
> Blood-stained, continue cutting weeds and shade.

Frank Horne's "Letters Found Near A Suicide" are variations on the "Spoon River" method. The idea is more significant than the poetry. And Lewis Alexander, another talented writer, relies too much on the Orientals: his "Tanka" and "Hokku" do not escape their Japanese models.

The six members of the younger generation represent the

frankly lyrical strain native to the darky everywhere. Readers need not be reminded of darky singing, whether they have heard it in sophisticated circles, in vaudeville or in places where it sounds best: as an accompaniment to labor in the fields or along river-fronts. Paul Robson, who sings so deep, Roland Hayes, who sings so high, the itinerant jubilee choruses, the masters of vaudeville (who can ever forget Bert Williams or the bird-like Florence Mills or shake off the singing feet of Bill Robinson?)—these are among the gifted artists of the American theatre. They have not been approached by their brethren of the pen, until we come to these younger writers. Even here, the approach has not been completed by achievement—except perhaps in the at-times perfect song of Countée Cullen, a song dependent on English models, but original none the less. The other poets, Brown, Hughes, Bontemps, Cuney, Helene Johnson, fall short of Cullen, by virtue of his profounder poignancy, varied richness, surer artistry. Wise white friends advise me that Cullen is not an authentic Negro poet. Possibly not. I find him to be what is more important: an authentic poet some of whose lyrics vie with the finest in America, regardless of color or extraction.

Sterling A. Brown is one of the few devotees of dialect verse —vide "Odyssey Of Big Boy" and "Long Gone." The latter is the ballad of a wastrel who can stay in one place and be faithful to one woman just a short time. He has "a itch fo' travellin' " on "de rails" and "de ties"—

> I is got to see some people
> I ain' never seen
> Gotta highball thu some country
> Whah I never been. . . .

Arna Bontemps of Louisiana is an addict to musical tones and images of a melancholy nature. He is a scholarly, rather than an original artist, with many years ahead for emerging in his own person. Waring Cuney, aged twenty-three, is more experimental. He is something of a metaphysician who employs Imagistic methods. The experiments of Helene Johnson, born in

Boston twenty-two years ago, carry farther than Cuney's, and are even more persuasive than those of Langston Hughes. Like the Joplin poet, she has fallen in love with Negro Harlem. She has translated blues and jazz into poetry, and forced magnificent bucks to reduce their vanity to the confines of sonnets. Her slang, like the slang of Hughes, is borrowed from Broadway. In this connection, it is curious that the Negro owes the Old Testament to the Hebrew, and that most syncopated music, originated by men of the streets like the Eastside Irving Berlin, has its foundation in Negro spirituals. Jazz is a cross between the Harlem Negro and the writers of musical comedy.

The title of Hughes' second book, "Fine Clothes For The Jew," requires no comment. His first book, "The Weary Blues," introduced by Carl Van Vechten, appeared three years ago and won a sensational success for the youthful globe-trotter. As the white ambassador to Harlem writes: "At the moment I cannot recall the name of any other person whatever who, at the age of twenty-three, has enjoyed so picturesque and rambling an existence as Langston Hughes." The poet drifted into New York in November, 1924. His best poems are the ones on Negro Harlem. He is the poet laureate of upper Seventh Avenue. Read in perspective and considered in the light of its reputation, "The Weary Blues" is a little disappointing. There are magic bits in the book, but most of the poems are derivative, mainly from Sandburg and Cummings and from Broadway songs. The miniature rituals composed in the manner of spirituals are effective:

"Me an' ma baby's
Got two mo' ways,
Two mo' ways to do de Charleston!
Da, da,
Da, da, da!
Two mo' ways to do de Charleston!"

This is one of the many little cabaret poems with a blues undercurrent. "To Midnight Nan At Leroy's" opens and closes:

Strut and wiggle,
Shameless gal.

Wouldn't no good fellow
Be your pal.

Such poems create a charming convention related to underlying tragedy, and are preferable to most of the serious poems with their sentimental echoes from the past. Like Fenton Johnson, McKay and Cullen, Hughes has given a poignant voice to the tragedy of mixed blood, and has done so in the terse lines of sharp lyrics:

My old man's a white old man
And my old mother's black.
If ever I cursed my white old man
I take my curses back. . . .

My old man died in a fine big house.
My ma died in a shack.
I wonder where I'm gonna die,
Being neither white nor black?

These lines contain the implications of a full-length novel or play. The heroic march of Negro women is beautifully revealed in "Mother To Son."

Don't you set down on the steps
'Cause you finds it's kinder hard.
Don't you fall now—
For I'se still goin', honey,
I'se still climbin',
And life for me ain't been no crystal stair.

"Epilogue," in which Hughes also sings America, belongs at the side of Hervey Allen's "Upstairs Downstairs." Though "the darker brother" in "Epilogue" is sent to the kitchen when company comes, there will come a time when "I'll sit at the table when company comes. . . . I, too, am America."

Countée Cullen was born in New York in 1903. This most precocious of Negroes was educated at New York University and at Harvard—where he earned an M. A. He began winning poetry prizes fairly early, and his first book, "Color," 1925, was received with enthusiasm. Though I have a chronic suspicion of popular poets, I heartily enjoy the best of Cullen's work.

"The Ballad Of The Brown Girl," and particularly his recent book, "Copper Sun," are not on a par with "Color." It is hard to account for this decline; it may be due to a growing interest in high-flown rhetoric and a corresponding loss in spontaneous lyrism. Cullen is essentially a lyric poet. Even his early sonnets sing:

> Yet do I marvel at this curious thing:
> To make a poet black, and bid him sing!

This note is developed in "Incident":

> Once riding in old Baltimore,
> Heart-filled, head-filled with glee,
> I saw a Baltimorean
> Keep looking straight at me.
>
> Now I was eight and very small,
> And he was no whit bigger,
> And so I smiled, but he poked out
> His tongue, and called me, "Nigger."
>
> I saw the whole of Baltimore
> From May until December;
> Of all the things that happened there
> That's all that I remember.

In the ballad called "Heritage," the poet, in an effort toward racial detachment, looks upon the new African nostalgia as certain Jewish rebels view the Zionist movement: as an atavistic mood not to be embraced by forward-looking people. But his heart plays a double rôle in which it wishes Christ were black,

> Thinking then it would not lack
> Precedent of pain to guide it,
> Let who would or might deride it . . .
> Lord, forgive me if my need
> Sometimes shapes a human creed.

As a rule, Cullen avoids this note, and sings exultantly of love, of Nature, of dark people. He advises a brown girl to give in to a lover's lips:

Since in the end consort together
Magdalen and Mary,
Youth is the time for careless weather:
Later, lass, be wary.

"Pagan Prayer" is a prayer for the race rather than himself—

For me, my faith lies fallowing,
I bow not till I see,
But these are humble and believe;
Bless their credulity.

Retrieving the race, so shall God and Christ "compass this black sheep, this pagan heart." A pagan heart it is indubitably, for, though the poet goes to church and puts his penny in,

. . . God's not fooled by such slight tricks,
And I'm not saved from sin.

He cannot hide the real gods of his heart, nor drive them out; nor does he anticipate passing the heavenly gate,

Unless He turns His face and lets
Me bring my own gods in.

I cannot see why my white friends belittle Cullen as a conservative merely because he chooses conventional song-forms, and states his devotion to Keats and Shelley. He has not alone freshened up lyrical forms, but has mastered the witty and intellectual tests of old Greek and Latin epigrams. Nor is tragedy absent from these sharp epitaphs: witness the tenderness of "For My Grandmother," "For A Virgin," "For A Philosopher." A pessimist, a cynic, a mouthy woman and a fatalist receive short shrift. The pessimist wears his coffin for a hat. God and the devil flee from the mouthy woman:

God wants no discord in his heaven;
Satan has enough in hell.

And the fatalist is polished off:

Here lies a man whose ships were wrecked
Ere he could hoist a sail.

And how succinct and final is the epilogue to "Copper Sun":

> The lily, being white not red,
> Contemns the vivid flower,
> And men alive believe the dead
> Have lost their vital power.
> Yet some prefer the brilliant shade,
> And pass the livid by:
> And no man knows if dead men fade
> Or bloom, save those that die. . . .

XXVII

YOUTH MOVES ON TOWARD MATURITY

Hands that work for the mind
Pursue a patient quest
To covet, seek, and find
And come to rest.

George Dillon.

CONTINUING the final inquiries begun in the former chapter, we come to recent Mid-Western poets, with emphasis on the pioneers at the University of Chicago; to New Englanders, with emphasis on the Harvard group; to the revived interest in narrative, led by Robinson Jeffers; and to the young group of hard-boiled poets, led by Joseph Moncure March. In addition to Jeffers and March, the narrative group contains Stephen Vincent Benét, Isidor Schneider, and two Yankees, Archibald MacLeish and Alice Mary Kimball. Outside of Chicago University, the Middle-West has added but a few names to poetry, but the list includes Hart Crane and Mark Van Doren. The latter and his Connecticut farm nominally belong to New England. Jeffers was born in Pittsburgh, but is more closely identified with California. And the New England and Harvard groups contain poets who were not born down East, but whose work identifies them with the oldest and ever fruitful American soil. Van Doren, MacLeish, and a comparatively unknown poet, Phelps Putnam, are its finest representatives; and the least known is probably the finest. Other downeast poets are Raymond Holden, Wilbert Snow, Frederick R. McCreary, Herbert S. Gorman, Alexander Laing. Snow of Maine is a poetic relative of Robert Frost; while Holden, though born in New York, is another. Holden has developed beyond his early influence, and, in a recent narrative, "Land-

scape With Figures," gives more than promise of becoming a dramatic realist. McCreary owes a little too much to Amy Lowell; and Gorman to Eliot and Elinor Wylie. Laing has set Vermont to the romanticism and disillusionment of A. E. Housman, and also owes something to Eliot and Cummings. In the Harvard group, I have taken the liberty of including three instructors: Robert Hillyer, S. Foster Damon, Joseph Auslander. The undergraduate group is represented by the vigorous periodical, *The Hound And Horn,* American offshoot of Eliot's *Criterion.* And in studying the course of recent poetry, one has to watch two experimental ventures: *transition,* the doughtiest of American periodicals abroad, and *The American Caravan.* Most of the newcomers and poets of to-morrow may be found in these ventures. I cannot undertake a list of names: no such list is satisfactory; nor can it be complete. But one may advise the reader not to lose sight of Howard Baker, Stanley Burnshaw, Clarence E. Cason, David Carter, Malcolm Cowley, Martin Feinstein, Lincoln Fitzell, Horace Gregory, Eugene Jolas, Edwin Morgan, Cary Ross, Jay G. Sigmund, Herman Spector, Charles Wagner and others. The "and others" are doubtless the very poets I should not have overlooked. One may find some of these in the latest Southern periodical, *Blues,* or in the latest expatriate paper, *The Exile,* edited by Ezra Pound. Or one may find them in the indefatigable columns of veteran magazines: *Poetry, The Nation, The New Republic.*

Among the tentative names listed above, the name of Cowley is particularly significant. He writes poetry only on rare occasions, but there is no better young poet than this will-o'-the-wisp. It is nothing less than exasperating that Cowley writes so little. Among the foreigners who have settled in America and brought over exotic tones and images, I find one Armenian, Leon Srabian Herald, and five Russians, Alter Brody, Louis Grudin, David Rosenthal, Isidor Schneider, Marya Zaturensky. Brody is more distinguished as a playwright and critic, Grudin as a formulator of esthetic systems. Rosenthal and Miss Zaturensky have written with persuasive charm, but neither has the originality of Herald or Schneider. Though Herald has diffi-

culties with the language, his work has genuine beauty and deserves a wider audience. The memories of his native village, Put-Aringe, not a trace of which remains nor a trace of his family, wiped out by the Turks—these poems are rich in images, droll as well as poignant. The preface to his one book, "This Waking Hour," concludes:

> My book is a dog:
> He may lick and heal a bad wound,
> Or wound badly.

His subsequent poems show a steady advance in artistry. Schneider likewise has difficulties with the language—or possibly performs conscious eccentricities. He is the most significant of all foreign-born American poets—vide "The Temptation Of Anthony." Reverting to the Middle-West, I find some further names: John V. A. Weaver, George O'Neil, and the Chicago University group. Weaver is really a New York poet, who came thither via Chicago and Charlotte, N. C., and raised the slang of the streets to metrical verse. His rhymed tales are kind-hearted, sentimental and humorous, and have earned popularity because of these minor virtues. His play, "Love 'Em And Leave 'Em," based on the rhymed tales, has similar virtues and limitations. Weaver has published several books of verse, beginning with "In American," 1921. The tales and characters have authenticity; the vernacular and versification are perfectly wedded; yet something is missing: the clever lines are closer to fantastic journalism than to imaginative poetry. Perhaps the poems are too soft-boiled. They resemble O. Henry rather than Sherwood Anderson, and have been surpassed by the tougher sentiment and cynicism of such up-to-date New Yorkers as Dorothy Parker and Samuel Hoffenstein. And these brilliant journalists have been surpassed by such poets as J. M. March, and the lesser known Kenneth Fearing. I have still to account for George O'Neil and the New Yorker, Robert Nathan. Both men have written lovely lyrics, but both have done better work as prosemen. The novels and novelettes of Nathan and O'Neil

derive part of their beauty from an earlier training in the art of poetry.

In addition to Elizabeth Madox Roberts, the Chicago University group brought out Glenway Wescott, Mark Turbyfill, Maurice Leseman, Yvor Winters, Janet Lewis and, more recently, George Dillon. Like Miss Roberts, Wescott has won greater fame as a novelist than a poet. His former poetry sounds mostly derivative now. It owed its inspiration to the Imagists. So did the early work of Yvor Winters, a poet-critic who now discredits Imagism and all other manifestations of the national renascence. The intellect is his zenith, and, like Tate, he has repudiated Eliot—a man of some intelligence. Hart Crane is the ruling prince of these young critics. Winters is also indebted to Williams—vide "Fire Sequence." These fragments have inner heat and a precision decorated with hard-boiled epithets. It is somewhat difficult to account for the tough note in cultivated poets. It seems to be a reaction against romantic estheticism and the twinges of individualism. There is irony in the spectacle of college graduates aping the manners and speech of rowdies. One has a notion that any genuine hoodlum would see through these toffs, and detect soft inhibitions under their hardened surfaces. None the less, the wedlock of intellectual and tough is a salient manifestation of the new era. Latterly, swayed by the metaphysicians, Winters has written compact sonnets on death and futility:

> Death. Nothing is simpler. One is dead.
> The face sets, to fade out, and the bare fact,
> related movement, rhythmic and intact,
> is reabsorbed, the clay is on the bed.

Mark Turbyfill is a romanticist masquerading as a scientist. His "Marriage With Space" is an extended hymn to modern machinery, and introduces rhythmic measures into the intellectual scheme. The measures do not dance with the grace and ease that Turbyfill dances in his other profession. Machines have a dynamic beauty which it remained for MacKnight Black to disclose. Janet Lewis has written a number of tiny etchings

which have not yet escaped the Imagists—vide "The Wheel In Midsummer." Maurice Leseman, the most accomplished poet of the group, excepting George Dillon, has written and published comparatively little. Most of his work has appeared in *Poetry*—likewise Dillon's. Assuredly, Miss Monroe has rarely printed a finer poem than Leseman's "A Man Walks In The Wind." The long grave lines of this chant weave love, desire, satiety, weariness, the wind and memory in a natural tapestry, youthful and mature. The same natural gravity invades the shorter poems. Here is a recent poem, "Son And Mother":

> In the open door his gray eyes glance aside.
> He droops at table, running his hand through his hair.
> It angers him that her own eyes never can hide
> Or harden themselves. He finds them always there,
> Always open upon him—soft and wide,
> Brimming like soft full moons. He does not care,
> Yet leaving the house, or coming at dawn from a dance,
> It is still a troublesome thing, though a somewhat dim
> Mystery now, to meet as if by chance
> Her soft wide-open eyes enveloping him.

George Dillon, of Jacksonville, Florida, was born twenty-three years ago. He became an associate editor of *Poetry* four years ago and published his first book, "Boy In The Wind," two years later. By his own confession, he is a descendant of "an interminable line of Georgia preachers and physicians." The didactic note is present in his work; so is the scientific; but he turns these and other notes to distinctive lyrical poetry. "Boy In The Wind" is the work of a mature heart and mind. The sensibilities imbibe a rich experience and are controlled by an intellect aware of a balanced destiny. The volume unfolds a considerable number of perfect or quasi-perfect poems, emotion and thought guided by an artistic consciousness and carved into clear, musical form. Dillon describes ideals of the present generation in the poem called "Hands," whose opening quatrain heads this chapter. Working for the mind, they "pursue a patient quest—"

> But hands are never stilled
> Serving the heart that grieves:

> Across the world unfilled
> They blow like leaves.

The wind blows throughout this slender book.

> What do you know of love that is only a want
> At night in the wind, when even the buildings blow
> And cry in their joists, and people are blown aslant
> With fences and trees and the dumb drift of snow?

The Windy City is felt in such quatrains—not to mention the whole of love lived courageously:

> What can we do but tremble still
> And kiss, and call the kiss a kiss,
> Having no eloquence for this
> Eternity we touch and kill?

In "The Hard Lovers" (note the modern adjective), the youngsters "bend in terrible anger . . . like wind-assaulted trees." The song concludes on a note of sheer sophistication:

> They coldly clash: if either
> Yields any tenderness
> It is that they together
> Share deeply one distress.

I do not feel the disease of despair in such lines. The mind of the youthful scientist faces facts. Everybody is a loser in the poem "To Losers," but here is no beating of the breast and crying on fate:

> Let loneliness be mute. Accuse
> Only the wind for what you lose. . . .
> It is the wordless wind that knows
> Where every kind of beauty goes.

And this "boy" has known Death, has seen him vanish with one dearly loved, to whom the poet chants a farewell serenade. And he has known the loss of some comrade and states it indirectly by describing the sun still pouring gold from "a round-mouthed pitcher." The metaphysical trend is an outcome of reading life and death, as well as books. One may find the old masters here, but they have still another voice. The poet is old enough to

know his conventions, and to dub a song on atoms, "Conventional Song." Though he is distracted by the magic "of this strong pregnant land six swift years" after the World War, and is "seizure to the high pretense of Beauty and her allegoric laughter," he "probes below earth's slowly flowing crust" to the "battle-blood on any battle-ground that ground serenely can assimilate." There is never the slightest attempt at mystification —bane of so many metaphysicians. Nor does he lift his voice in prayer or moaning hypotheses. The five final words of this sonnet answer all inquiries:

> Seeing at last how each thing here beneath
> The glimmering stars is lawful: having found
> By a wide watch how scrupulously Death
> To keep his tacit promises is bound,
> How from their vagrance the disbanded dusts
> Resume integrity in blood or bloom,
> How punctually the sun-struck red rose thrusts
> Its rigid flame into the golden gloom;
>
> Knowing that ultimate prospect where appears
> The accurate ebb and flood of furious water,
> The undirected wind's clean course, the sphere's
> Deliberate strong spinning, I would utter
> No question now, nor prosecute in words
> Why birds must fly, seeing the flight of birds.

Moving from Chicago to Harvard, we come to a not so varied group of undergraduate poets, and to the three English instructors whose poetry belongs to an earlier period. Robert Hillyer began issuing books of verse twelve years ago and has published seven so far, the last of which is called, "The Seventh Hill." Most of his poetry lies in the field of romantic meditation, and is almost flawless technically. In this respect, it echoes the richer muse of Conrad Aiken, an older Harvardian. It may be my fault that I cannot read more than a few of these poems at a sitting. One admires the self-discipline of the poet, in the lamplight of classical verse, but cannot help hoping that a gust will shatter the lamp and drive the poet outdoors. Like Aiken, Hillyer ought to break the rules now and then and play hooky with irregularity. S. Foster Damon and Joseph Auslander, like-

wise bookish and romantic, have more interest than Hillyer. Damon has been writing for fifteen years, but has issued just one volume: "Astrolabe," subtitled "Infinitudes and Hypocrisies." William Blake is at the core of Damon's poetry. But Blake was mad by nature; Damon goes mad systematically. None the less, "Burning Bush" is quite a remarkable poem. Damon, a philosopher, attempts to find the second in the first person and to write about them in the third, aware that objectivity is an ideal and illusion:

> Men are but mirrors, where I see
> Myself, myself innumerably.

"Hotel Lobby" is a witty piece in which the poet notes that traveling salesmen are afflicted with a "tragic withering of eyes . . . due to lack of exercise—"

> For eyes can only be kept clean
> By seeing what we call unseen.

Supplanting intense ideals with facts,

> Then eyes fall from their state as stars,
> And glow like nearly-gone cigars.

Damon is never monotonous. His agile intelligence lights on unexpected places. There are many modern things, beside drummers, his mind cannot stomach. Not the least of these is New York at dusk. Against a rich sky, an aeroplane writes in smoke the name of a cheap cigarette, or an invisible hand "scribbles in flame the name of a new chewing gum."

> O mob, you have formed the world to your desire!
> You are your own God: the old gods are dead.
> These are your pillar of cloud, your pillar of fire;
> These are your substitutes for wine and bread.

And so, like Hillyer, Damon is more at ease in the past. So is Joseph Auslander, an accomplished rhetorician who now enjoys the rewards of an industry devoted to Pegasus.

Continuous intoxication is the norm of Auslander's poetry—an ecstasy often prompted by consciousness, rather than wine.

In the midst of a steady communion with Nature—with an especial devotion to water, birds and animals—the poet rarely forgets his classics: his lines beat with classical images and metres. The rhetoric of his first book, "Sunrise Trumpets" (introduced by Padraic Colum) has come under better control in subsequent volumes: "Medusa's Head," "Cyclops' Eye," "Letters To Women." Even in these volumes, one is never quite unconscious of the poet conscious of his art and artistry. Auslander's idol-worship is admirable so long as we see the image and not too much of the idolater. Nor can we follow persistent exaltation without falling weary: everything is exalted; nothing is commonplace. An occasional cliché would relieve the tension; but banalities of mood or thought are invested with expansive metaphors. Rhetoric is the Philadelphian's grandest virtue and sin.

> The cow swings her head in a deep drowsy half-circle to and over
> Flank and shoulder, lunging
> At flies; then fragrantly plunging
> Down at the web-washed grass and the golden clover,
> Wrenching sideways to get the full tingle; with one warm nudge,
> One somnolent wide smudge
> Sacred to kine,
> Crushing a murmurous afternoon of late lush August to wine!

In an effort to produce harder images and cadences, the poet has subdued his rhetoric to an approximate realism; and we may look for further development along this vein. His sonnets, some of which echo the idolized Elinor Wylie, have more power than his metrical inventions. Here is the octave of "Diablerie":

> It pleased the devil to make you beautiful,
> Appraise you with a black reflective thumb,
> Brush in your eyes the brilliant idiom
> Of his own sooty speech, and on your skull
> The soft soot-colored plumage of a gull;
> And in your throat he dropped the honeyed hum
> Of Lilith to which braver fools succumb
> Than I since Adam found the Garden dull.

The sonnets to Amy Lowell (who was once dreaded by the whole of Harvard) have a rapturous tone humanized by humor.

He describes the "few anointed" waiting for the empress to arrive (always an hour late, if the truth were told!). "And it was vividly You saluting your uhlans from the head of the stair!" In an effort to conquer up-to-date realism, Auslander composed a fight-poem called "Knockout," in which he made use of the glorious prize ring jargon as devised by our sporting writers. When March's "The Set-Up" appeared, the youthful New Yorker was accused of plagiarism. Whether March stole or did not steal his idea from "Knockout" or from Hemingway's "Fifty Grand" is negligible. "The Set-Up" is better than "Knockout" and "Fifty Grand," better than either. In his "Letters To Women," Auslander has returned to a more congenial atmosphere. The book has just gone to press; it contains ecstatic tributes to Sappho, Duse, Amy Lowell, Emily Dickinson, Elinor Wylie and one or two other immortal ladies.

The Hound And Horn, a quarterly, founded about two years ago, is dedicated to "the undergraduate and graduate activity" of Harvard University. A board of several editors has a consulting committee of which Conrad Aiken is a member. T. S. Eliot is the idol of the young Harvard movement, and *The Criterion* its lofty standard. In leafing over the first seven issues in perspective, I have read most of the poems and some of the essays, and find the criticism superior. Despite a brahminical tone, rather cocksure and omniscient, the essays of R. P. Blackmur and Lincoln Kirstein, two of the editors, deserve serious consideration. A school of substantial criticism is in the making. Among the regular contributors of poetry, John Wheelwright is somewhat in the lead. J. R. Agee, H. N. Doughty, Jr., Dudley Fitts, in addition to Blackmur and Kirstein, have not yet evolved a personal idiom. Their work depends on Eliot and the old metaphysicians: cosmic agony is universal to one and all. As Blackmur writes—

> A man most anxious for eternity
> Lifting an awkward, naked face.

Stanley J. Kunitz—so I have heard—was one of the instigators of *The Hound And Horn.* He is a recent graduate none of

whose lines have appeared in the quarterly. Kunitz has made rapid progress since leaving Harvard: during the past few months whole groups of poems have been accepted by *The Dial, The Nation, Poetry, The American Caravan*"; and a book is announced for publication under the title, "Intellectual Things." I prefer the title I saw in manuscript: "Against Destruction." The old title describes the meat of the book; the new describes the manner. Though Kunitz is another metaphysician indebted to Donne, Eliot and Elinor Wylie, he is on the road to originality. His gravest danger lies in over-confidence and facility. Happily, the poet is only twenty-three, and his confidence is based on passion and intelligence. If he asks the brain to "be ice, a frozen bowl of thought," it is not because he repudiates emotions. The brain endeavors to

> Be fever's sepulcher,
> Entomb the noise of frightened blood,
> That man may strictly hear
> The truthful pulse of beauty
> Beyond this evil good.

And though, like his fellows, he holds communion with death and eternity, he is against morbid or defeated conclusions, "against destruction."

> The dead would murder action. Oh I know
> Their subtle ways. They separate with fear
> The fiery lips of thought. And I shall go
> By silent lanes and leave you timeless here.

If lines along the lanes are sometimes too recherché, it is because the poet is in search of the absolute and can accept nothing less. Here is his litany:

> Let me not be given,
> A sight of Heaven,
> For blackened are the eager eyes
> That look on Paradise.
>
> Offer me no meaning
> That intervening
> Between the darkness and the light
> Will make the sun less bright.

Save me from contentment,
But spare my resentment
Against the uninhabited,
The large uneaten dead.

Teach this heart to suffer,
And make it tougher
To withstand the slow outrageous fire
Of mammalian desire.

Keep my soul to ravage,
O keep it savage,
Preserve it lean with hungering,
So may the lone bird sing.

Two Yale poets, Archibald MacLeish and Phelps Putnam, surpass the neo Harvardians. The former issued two or three undistinguished volumes with the Yale University Press. These were followed by "The Happy Marriage," "The Pot Of Earth," "Streets In The Moon" and recently, "The Hamlet Of A. MacLeish." Putnam has published but one book, "Trinc," known only to connoisseurs. No finer book has appeared during the past decade. A recent narrative, "Daughters Of The Sun," not yet published in book form, is even finer than "Trinc." Next to this narrative, those of MacLeish have a bookish air, while those of the suddenly popular Alice Mary Kimball sound rather vulgar. Miss Kimball's interests are more human than MacLeish's: she works in objective material; she is fascinated by the sex-starved life of degenerate Yankees. In short, she deals in Americana not unrelated to the morons who delight Mencken and Sinclair Lewis. But Lewis is an accurate reporter; Miss Kimball descends unwittingly to melodrama and farce. She commits the unpardonable sin of laughing at her helpless characters. No one could ask for better material than "The Devil Is A Woman" discloses; some of it is handled well enough for the reader to look for still better work ahead. One is tempted to compare these narratives with the succinct tales in "Spoon River" or the human studies undertaken by Robert Frost. The comparison leaves Miss Kimball far in the rear. She needs a little more culture to mold a cleaner esthetic form.

Of this culture, MacLeish is an abundant possessor. He has applied it, however, not to the life around him, but to the inner life of the ego as affected by life. This is ever a magnificent problem. The trouble with MacLeish seems to be that he cannot escape the perpetual mood of despair and disillusionment handed down by the late war, and handed down by accomplished writers whom the poet has not quite escaped. His disappointed romanticism owes a great deal to Eliot and almost as much to Aiken. Before "Streets In The Moon," MacLeish was a frank romanticist and declared himself with lyric effectiveness—notably in "The Pot Of Earth," an extended poem about the puberty, adolescence, love, marriage and child-bearing of womanhood. In "Streets Of The Moon," 1926, published when the poet was about thirty-four, a transitional stage sets in: the romanticism is attacked by doubt, skepticism, cynicism. The author has been imbibing "The Waste Land": witness "L'An Trentiesme De Mon Eage." The title, "The Too-Late Born," may be found in other contemporaries. It reveals the transitional state of a person who belongs neither to the past nor the future and feels the earth reeling beneath him.

> Must we be deaf, be dumb
> Till the silence come?

The poet describes his group as "the outcasts, the intelligent." Outcasts from what? From the grasses, the green leaves, rhododendrons.

> The figs have nothing to say to us,
> Nor now in the worn ways the stones,
> Nor the stars either.

One might ask: Why bother about figs and such? And what is their speech if they have one? To this the cognoscenti would retort: we are outcasts of present-day society, and wouldn't care to join it if we could. It is dull and materialistic, and is run by morons elected by morons. Such an attitude, voiced in our liberal papers, is hardly intelligent or intelligible. It is outside the concern of a genuine artist; such a fellow takes life as it is, not as he'd like it to be, and reshapes it through his own

powers and limitations. MacLeish happens to be an artist. One would like to see him divorce himself from the outcasts and go his own way. Part Two of the moon book is headed, "Several Shadows Of A Skull." Here we are in for further metaphysics —and physics to boot: a poem on Einstein's Relativity brilliantly evolved in the manner, at times, of Eliot and Aiken. We begin to weary somewhat of cosmic reveries and poetry reared on science and philosophy. One yearns for "the miracle of usual things." One has long since accepted the fact that a man is lonely; that his search must return upon himself:

> Like a foam
> His flesh is withered and his shrivelling
> And ashy bones are scattered on the dark.
> But still the dark denies him. Still withstands
> The dust his penetration and flings back
> Himself to answer him.

Like Cummings, MacLeish, the defeated romantic, has turned on the world and bitten it savagely. Such sonnets as "Corporate Entity," "The Literary Colyumist" and "The End Of The World" (finis of "Streets In The Moon") are richly conceived and executed. The octave of the last sonnet sounds like Cummings, the sestet like Eliot:

> Quite unexpectedly as Vasserot
> The armless ambidextrian was lighting
> A match between his great and second toe
> And Ralph the lion was engaged in biting
> The neck of Madame Sossman while the drum
> Pointed, and Teeny was about to cough
> In waltz-time swinging Jocko by the thumb—
> Quite unexpectedly the top blew off:
>
> And there, there overhead, there, there, hung over
> Those thousands of white faces, those dazed eyes,
> There in the starless dark the poise, the hover,
> There with vast wings across the cancelled skies,
> There in the sudden blackness the black pall
> Of nothing, nothing, nothing,—nothing at all.

Phelps Putnam's "Trinc" derives its title from a bibulous passage in Rabelais, trinc being the sound made by a bottle held

to the human ear. Putnam's poetry has the intoxication of the grape the Yale man celebrates in strong stanzas. One must go to Anacreon or to Emerson's "Bacchus" for lines as lusty as the sonnets on drink. Any man who imbibes a bellyful of wine and holds himself straight enough to write chiseled sonnets carries his liquor like a gentleman. I am no authority on wassailing: the sun in midwinter or rain in midsummer give me all the wine I need. But I know a son of the grape when I see one: Putnam and his poetry are genuine. They have nothing to do with Prohibition gin, diluted rye, a quarter of one per cent beer. Nor is this man a member of street corner gangs who bark at the moon and assert their pseudo masculinity. The worst phase of the younger generation is its tedious exhibitionism. Putnam is a forthright person, a fellow with a passionate heart and keen intelligence. If he drinks, he drinks "because the head is not so nobly made . . . the fallow skull needs watering . . ."

> And when the mind stirs out of somnolence
> It smiles to see its cruel garden bear
> The tall and gleaming flower of insolence.

Strong drink sets the soul "free of its reserve, and dignity dissolves,"

> For drink corrodes that bright machinery
> In which the educated soul resolves.

The soul, grown to an eaglet,

> Plays with a drunken brother in the clouds,
> Or by itself, serenely and alone,
> It balances above the sober crowds.

If Hemingway's "The Sun Also Rises," with its drunken brawls on every page, is a true narrative of bored Americans abroad, "Trinc" is an accurate portrayal of youngsters at home who face a despairing existence with courage and wit. Shams, lies, perversion and pretense have no place here; they are riddled with scathing laughter. Putnam was educated at Yale. His six sonnets in memory of college days are a revelation of what goes on behind the curriculum.

> We lived there once, and then across our days
> Strode death, a masquerader capped and gowned;
> And we, the boys whom nothing could amaze,
> Stepped downward into life and so were drowned.

College was the place where joking despair, thin remorse, arrogant sin, indolence, drunkenness and derisive mirth played prominent rôles. Into "the ribaldry of nights . . . the bright harlot, thought, came out to dance."

> We did not yearn for liberty or truth;
> And so they came to us once, in our youth.

The lads "were undefiled by theorems of slaves." Kindly impotent instructors "rained illusions on our innocence,"

> But none could touch the quick, because we knew
> That candid rowdy truth which we had seen.

Theirs was no mere precocity, but a mature instinct for the values of life. The godly college chime "rang scrupulously" in order "to make us mindful boys."

> But now this wisdom sits upon our lips,
> And smart reserve has caked us up with mold;
> The winds die down to little breezy quips,
> And not a hand can ring us, soft or bold.
>
> Or if chance wakes our resonance again,
> We clang the dull and sodden speech of men.

The novel or history of a generation of undergraduates is epitomized in the Yale sonnet sequence. Putnam's is the masculine voice of the American campus. And the defensive weapon fashioned by youth is the sword of cynicism. Six more sonnets reveal this development. The poet calls on the sword to

> Destroy the many grandeurs and that crew
> Who know the solid way their feet shall keep.

"Replete philosophies . . . high and pompous words . . . elegance of pose" are destroyed:

> Austere and lonely saint, O vagrant soul,
> From birth and nothing on your way to death

> And nothingness, the broad and empty goal,
> Come teach my breathing heart to save its breath.
>
> Make it a seasoned stoic in its age,
> An armored child, a swift and careless sage.

This is passion, wisdom and lyrism of a high order. And the poet sees that all roads lead to nothingness, that the graceful things we call "certitude and scorn and faith and doubt" are gilded names, that bitter and sweet are part of the same lie. And those who jeer at nothingness or call it a god play with masks—"the smart accoutrements of flimsy lords . . . tiny shadows seen against the empty clarity of night."

> Nothing remains—no swords, no dust, no dance,
> Not even silence, and not even chance.

He finally turns on his own pretensions: "Brave cynic fellow, now unclench your hand and put your sword away." "Old to-morrow leans upon the land" and misses "the misty roar of fatal stuttering and hollow sound." "Life and death go milling round and round," yielding "a scattered grain of dust and bones" at the centre of which the ego half sees "the hurried vanity go by." The hard beauty of this sequence bears its own weapon against the poet's expectation of extinction.

The poems on women have the same analytical passion and wisdom; also the six sonnets on friendship. Part Two, entitled "Brandy," unfolds a series of inimitable modern ballads setting forth the love adventures of a group of friends, of which Bill Williams (not to be confused with the Rutherford medico) is the hero. "Epistle To Mr. Manning And Mr. Walker," inspired by a murder headline in the New York *American,* is a magnificent ballad wherein the poet, in answer to the stupid coroner's stupid inquiry, "What was the cause of death," propounds a phantasmagoria of adventures leading to death, and explodes various cosmologies with vitriolic satire. Papa One-Stone's cosmology goes the way of the rest, and so does Bill's adoration of Marjory, the heroine, Bill's own cosmology. "Bill And Les Enfants Perdus," "Hasbrouck And The Rose" and "Bill Gets Burned" continue this lusty drama; and Putnam's recent narra-

tive, "Daughters Of The Sun," is a further development. The scheme owes part of its inception to Eliot's Sweeney series, but the Williams ballads are more human, more racy. Some of the scenes are laid in Hell, the hell of reality and of the imagination —an American purgatory. The ballads drive on unhindered by psychologic circumlocution—the bane of Robinson and of Robinson Jeffers. Putnam is a very slow worker; he re-writes much more than he writes. But I am confident that when he finishes the adventures of Bill Williams and his pals (if ever he does), the Boston poet will produce a book not very far behind the picaresque classics of Chaucer, Boccaccio and Grandfather Rabelais. If ever a land needed a picaresque poet it is ours. Longfellow made a start in "Tales Of A Wayside Inn." The Cambridge poet had the best wine-cellar in all New England. Putnam has no better wine-cellar than the rich cask in his fiery heart. Emerson had no wine-cellar either—except the one in his marvelous head. Most of our poetry has grown arid and bookish. Happily, some of us are getting drunk on an independent Yankee. If he were a good fellow he would hand the name of his bootlegger to the rest of the younger generation. Possibly the name is Phelps Putnam.

The poetry of Mark Van Doren, an Illinois metaphysician, transplanted to Connecticut, affords additional relief to readers sated with the vertigo of bookish poets. A few vital factors have saved Van Doren from growing dull: he lives on a farm and knows Nature intimately; his principal masters are such commonsense Yankees as Emerson and Frost; and he has an eye and ear of his own and a style deleted of the "highfalutin," and devoted to an Anglo-Saxon rendering of concrete images. He may sound rather dry at first, but as one grows accustomed to his precision, one is moved by his passion and the wisdom of his deductions—deductions often left to the imagination. Van Doren has issued three volumes—"Spring Thunder," "7 P. M.," "Now The Sky"—and his development has been the steady advance of the deeper type of American character. We constantly have to revert to Yankee soil for such characters, and for the independence of which Emerson was the poetic founder.

The last poem in "7 P. M."—"The Sage In The Sierras"—pays tribute to the Concord bard.

Van Doren has mastered many variations of the short-lined lyric, not to mention the broader measures of the irregular lyric. His speech is rarely strained; his lines are simple and compact; few metres or rhymes are forced. How complete an impression of autumn is breathed in this quatrain:

> Time grew so thin
> That it could hang
> Between these hills,
> Where nothing sang . . .

Winter and death in the woods—"death in a dateless gloom"—are sounded by "The Tuning-Fork," a perfect title:

> One dead tree
> With arms upswung—
> Silver cold—
> Is the forest's tongue.

These perfect notes occur on nearly every page: their felicity comes out of a regard for Nature's intimacies. "Tree-Dwellers" relates the biography of things that live on the life of trees:

> Ants file past
> To the end of the last
> Thin twig, and finding
> An ultimate, vast
> Green meadow, graze;
> While back in the maze
> Of the body are winding
> Worms in the dark,
> That never this bark
> Shall open to show
> One small bird binding
> Straws in a row,
> And treading them, so.

The poems on farm beasts, foxes, birds, turkey-buzzards, insects, mice, puppies, also echo humanity. In "Problem," the puppy, so rich in unearthed belongings that he never stirs, is a shrewd

philosopher. So is the poet in his discussions of love and marriage. Yankee wit, by no means comparable with Emerson's or Frost's, but none the less wit, saves Van Doren from morbid conclusions on wedlock. Grief, in the presence of an infant suddenly dead, deals with the facts, facts that soothe the heart. The poem, "Ambush," envisages the father finding comfort in the streets, until he encounters children singing from a tree, puppies being shoved into a pool by a boy, two ancient women sitting on a porch.

> Soon I was out of hearing; and I knew
> There went no word between them as they grew
> Expectant of the next foot that would fall.
> I tried forgetting, but my thoughts were all
> Of darkness, and a path before a den,
> And silent, silent spiders watching men.

"Now The Sky," a more ambitious volume, is more concerned with large abstractions. Apparently, primitive races had the advantage of us: "There is something now we know confusing all they saw with misty fire." For them, clarity and simplicity; for us, confusion and complexity.

> We straitly rise,
> We stiffly fall.
> We do not listen
> If men call
>
> On ignorant winds
> To set love right.
> That was our day.
> This is our night.

"The tale is one of losing, and of lids that fail." The poet gives the impression he was born too late—like MacLeish and other scholarly contemporaries. I am sorry to find this note in Van Doren. He is sturdy enough to move on without sighing for the bygone. At least, his reading is alive: he sees that the authors of books were not worms. On the whole, I still prefer his Nature poems and studies of Yankee character. "Defeated Farmer" is a memorable portrait:

Once he thought the wind conspired
With wet and dry and hot and cold
To slave for him. But he is old,
And long ago the year was tired,
And if the wind was ever hired
It bustled off to better gold.

"Poorhouse Dream" is an excellent title for an excellent poem on the coming of Death. "A tall horse with large white feet" carries men down a commonplace, commonsense road. Van Doren's simplicity, natural march of sensibilities, and independence of outlook, augur well for his future. In "Farewell To Fields," he parts with Nature—not for good, let us hope:

There is another wildness to be travelled,
And I have set my feet to go alone.
Over no grass, and by no greying stone,
I now would hunt new music out of bare
Hatred, and quick love, and old despair.
Where I am going men and women go.
Fold up your pipes that have instructed so.

Van Doren belongs to the advance guard of new humanists; and humanism tends more and more to become the next religion.

About seven years ago, a group of vigorous young men who gathered around the New York office of *Broom,* an international magazine with headquarters in Papal Rome, decided to secede from most things American. The results of their revolt were housed in the magazine, *Secession.*. One expected great things from this group, for it contained among others: Malcolm Cowley, Kenneth Burke, Gorham B. Munson, Slater Brown, Matthew Josephson and Hart Crane. Internecine warfare broke up the group: *Secession* and several tributary magazines were disbanded. Crane, the Clevelander, who had come to New York with a modest sheaf of Imagistic poems, ultimately surpassed his fellows. A small cult has grown up round his poetry, a cult which threatens to supersede the Eliot cult. The comparatively youthful Crane is an exceedingly difficult poet. His

critics and propagandists, anxious to interpret the difficulties and remove all obstacles between the poet and a prospective audience, have done a number of sound things and a number of silly. I confess I used to find the hosannahs distasteful: they distracted the ear from the intrinsic merits of Crane's poetry. I let myself indulge a hesitant attitude. I have re-read his first volume, "White Buildings," many times; and some of the advance poems of his next volume, "The Bridge." In re-reading the book and new poems against the gamut of American poetry, I begin to see what I failed to see before: Hart Crane is a poet stemming from the major traditions of our soil and literature. Though he came out of Imagism, and bent a knee to Eliot and Stevens, Laforgue and Rimbaud, one finds his real forbears in Whitman and Melville—a fact disclosed by Allen Tate in his preface to "White Buildings." I used to read that preface with distrust and distaste; reading it again, I admit an injustice to Crane's leading interpreter. Tate was confronted with the unwieldy task of clarifying Crane's obscurities and of logically setting forth the poet's achievement. Formerly, I suspected the large claims Tate made for Crane; now I find them quite defensible.

"The poetry of Hart Crane is ambitious. It is the only poetry I am acquainted with which is at once contemporary and in the grand manner." One takes sole exception to the word, only—for there are others, not the least of whom is Phelps Putnam. The author of "White Buildings" "is the poet of the complex urban civilization of his age: precision, abstraction, power. . . . Crane suddenly broke with the methods of Imagism, with its decorative and fragmentary world. To the conceptual mind a world set up not by inclusive assertion but by exclusive attention to the objects of sense lacks imaginative coördination; a method which refuses to exceed the dry presentation of *petites sensations* confines the creative vision to suggestions, to implicit indications, but it cannot arrive at the direct affirmation, of a complete world. . . . The poems of Hart Crane are facets of a single vision; they refer to a central imagination, a single

evaluating power, which is at once the motive of the poetry and the form of its realization. . . . If the enerrgy of Crane's vision never quite reaches a sustained maximum, it is because he has not found a suitable theme." One perceives the overture of this theme in the American poems subsequent to "White Buildings," and sees still more clearly Crane's kinship with the tradition of Whitman and Melville. "Whitman's range was possible in an America of prophecy; Crane's America is materially the same; but it approaches a balance of forces; it is a realization; and the poet, confronted with a complex present experience, gains in intensity what he loses in range. The great proportions of the myth have collapsed in its reality. Crane's poetry is a concentration of certain phases of the Whitman substance, the fragments of the myth." In conclusion, Tate does not overlook the poet's faults. "The vision often strains and overreaches the theme. This fault, common among ambitious poets since Baudelaire, is not unique with them. It exists whenever the existing poetic order no longer supports the imagination." But it is in single grand passages, rather than whole poems, that Crane reveals the power and sweep of his concentric vision. One cannot condone the obscurities in toto, nor entirely subscribe to a style which is often more grandiose than a given occasion demands. The endeavor to hammer homeruns in every line, phrase and syllable, sometimes defeats the batter, and leaves him fanning the air. Whenever the poet connects with the ball, he drives it farther than most of the men of his generation. And he is one of the few poets with a definite future.

A line out of Rimbaud is the motto of "White Buildings": *Ce ne peut être que la fin du monde, en avançant.* The metaphysician in Crane is content to analyze and synthesize things this side of to-morrow. Memory, "emotion recollected in tranquillity," passion intelligently handled, create the solid form of a vision:

> Then, drop by caustic drop, a perfect cry
> Shall string some constant harmony,—
> Relentless caper for all those who step
> The legend of their youth into the noon.

"Black Tambourine," akin to Eliot in the range of its quatrains, is a broad summary of African history, from Æsop to Negro Harlem—

> Between his tambourine, stuck on the wall,
> And, in Africa, a carcass quick with flies.

"My Grandmother's Love Letters," though a spotty poem, has a profound tenderness. Crane, unlike most young poets, is not afraid of the heart. He moves about in its passion and serenity and even embraces its sentiment. He does not pin the intellect to a pinnacle and fall down in self-worship. If he had no other quality, his love would be enough. "Garden Abstract," the only Imagistic poem saved from his teens, is a thing in perfect blank verse—an orotund instrument in the hands of this poet. Here is the first stanza:

> The apple on its bough is her desire,—
> Shining suspension, mimic of the sun.
> The bough has caught her breath up, and her voice,
> Dumbly articulate in the slant and rise
> Of branch on branch above her, blurs her eyes.
> She is prisoner of the tree and its green fingers.

"Chaplinesque" is an adjustment between poetry and pity—pity, the core of Chaplin:

> For we can still love the world, who find
> A famished kitten on the step, and know
> Recesses for it from the fury of the street,
> Or warm torn elbow coverts.

We can evade "all else but the heart" and have seen

> The moon in lonely alleys make
> A grail of laughter of an empty ash can . . .

In going to school with Chaplin, Crane has attended a better school than Harvard or Yale. The diminutive tragi-comedian has more knowledge in his flapping feet and "pliant cane" than a lamplit eye can find in encyclopedias. By contrast to "Chaplinesque," "North Labrador" reads like a page out of Melville—"A land of leaning ice . . . flings itself silently into eternity."

"Repose Of Rivers" has a large, concrete vision, and makes one feel the Mississippi and the Hudson which play growing rôles in the poems composing "The Bridge." "At Melville's Tomb" is an expression of indebtedness to our epic seafarer and proseman. The six poems of "Voyages" round out the sea poems:

> Mark how her turning shoulders wind the hours,
> And hasten while her penniless rich palms
> Pass superscription of bent foam and wave,—
> Hasten, while they are true,—sleep, death, desire,
> Close round one instant in one floating flower.

"For The Marriage Of Faustus And Helen," which made a name for *Secession* as well as for Crane, owes part of its technical excellence to Eliot's interest in the commonplace wedded to the majestic speech of Jonson, Marlowe and Dryden. Crane's poem closes:

> Distinctly praise the years, whose volatile
> Blamed bleeding hands extend and thresh the height
> The imagination spans beyond despair,
> Outpacing bargain, vocable and prayer.

Into the crucible of the imagination, Crane now drives folk sagas, Christopher Columbus, Pocahontas, songs of cowboys and railroad men, the Mississippi River, bridges, transcontinental trains, Bert Williams and other heroic vaudevillians, and jazz. Some of the folkish passages sound interpolated; they have not been transformed; they sound better in their originals. But the poet is pursuing his proper destiny, and is leaving room for the accidents of ecstasy and drunkenness. "The Wine Menagerie" holds the right philosophy for a poet—whether he drinks or not:

> Invariably when wine redeems the sight,
> Narrowing the mustard scansions of the eyes,
> A leopard ranging always in the brow
> Asserts a vision in the slumbering gaze.

Hearsay gossips that Crane is at his best after a lengthy bout with the bowl. If this be the case, here is another high reason

for rescinding the Eighteenth Amendment. In a land grown dry and metaphysical, blowzy with despair and disillusionment, the clarion tone of this visionary youth is a tonic. His next book will show the stride he has taken beyond "White Buildings." It will be an erratic book, but its main march will come out of our best tradition and penetrate the future. Meanwhile, I hope the Crane cult perishes overnight. It is hard enough for an original poet to develop without being encumbered with hectic idolaters. I have heard that Crane is deaf to his ardent friends. I devoutly hope this is true.

If Hart Crane has not yet found a theme large enough for his powers, it may be said that Stephen Benét, in "John Brown's Body," attempted too large a canvas. But any failure on a grand scale is always admirable. It has been observed that recent American poets, in an effort to produce perfection, have become obsessed with polishing some microscopic image, or, haunted by cosmologies, have reduced the universe to polysyllabic abstractions in which human beings are beheld as atoms. If one now wearies of Imagism, one has also begun to weary of a poetic world in which the race is reduced to microbes underneath a lens fastened in the knowing eye of some poet who has read quite a few books on science and psychology, and holds an omniscient altitude by virtue of other men's discoveries. Benét and other young poets are returning to an older view of man—man, the heroic puppet—a view by no means romantic. The renewed interest in epic forms is based on this view, and the poet passionate enough to attempt nothing less than a major theme is the poet of to-morrow. America is old enough and rich enough in racial experience to offer major material. The modern movement in history and biography is an earnest of a larger, more expert examination of our past with reference to our present and future. A man need no longer import his writing material from abroad. Longfellow's day is long since past. So is Ezra Pound's. Obviously, but never obviously enough for certain esthetes, any race is a member of the human race. One need not be a chauvinist to detect the major tendencies of the American experiment. The theme as a whole is tremendous;

and its myriad ramifications have minor details of a major character. It is time for the native poet to be writing poems on a universal scale; to show how large the little is, no matter how little. He no longer has to invent his themes; the less he invents the better. He may find them in the American tradition. The tradition may not be completely grounded, broadened, mellowed. Most things, in a continental experiment, may still lie ahead. The old experiment may be a failure, and the new fail even more tragically. But human beings were concerned in the tragedy. Their effort and failure, and their relation to one another along the way, reveal an endless succession of heroic themes. Major poets are the rarest of human beings. We have not had an epic poet since Whitman. But we have had many minor poets attempting a major theme. Benét is the most recent of these.

Though he is still a young man, he has been writing ballads and narratives for a number of years. His first book, "Five Men And Pompey," was issued by The Yale University Press in 1915, when the poet was seventeen. Three other volumes of verse and four or five rather popular novels, not to mention a play or two, have followed rapidly. One does not object to the popular appeal behind Benét's work. In choosing the Civil War as the theme for "John Brown's Body," he obeyed the tradition of epic writers from Homer down: they used material common to their own race and known to the average household for years and centuries. Possibly, we are still too close to the Civil War. We are only beginning to see it en masse, and to understand its motives, motives for the most part dark to its protagonists, darker still to its people, and darkest of all to the gray and blue men in the field. But certain facts are now apparent: we perceive their approximate order and realize that the greatest issue of the war was not the Negro question, not the saving of the Union or the defense of States' rights, but the economic issue. From John Brown's attack on Harpers Ferry to Lincoln's assassination, this issue is the undercurrent of Benét's saga. Benét, though still a young man, was so thoroughly saturated with the war, from infancy on, thanks to his father's

memories, and has made so persistent a study of histories, biographies, newspapers, facts, hearsay, legends and lies, as to be the poet best fitted at present to compose a Civil War epic. His poem is a fascinating document, deriving part of its fascination from the familiarity of the theme and of the characters and issues involved. But it is a document rather than a major poem: a book composed of glorious fragments of poetry, thrilling battlescenes, portraits of the leaders and portraits of minor characters.

No history has given us a more intimate feeling of the war: one feels everything and everybody: the Southern soil, the Northern soil, the border states, the European vultures, England and France—John Brown, Davis, Lincoln, Lee, Jackson, Beauregard, Longstreet, Pickett, MacClellan, Meade, Hooker, Grant—and the fictitious characters: the Wingates of Georgia, the Wingate home, the Southern aristocracy, Southern ladies, the gypsy-like Sally Dupré, the ladylike Lucy Weatherby, the marvelous Negroes, Cudjo, faithful to his masters, and Spade, the runaway slave who finds less freedom in the North—and the Northern protagonist, Jack Ellyat of Connecticut, and the dryad he falls in love with, Melora Vilas, and deserts after their first night—a beautiful lyric episode. And the soldiers themselves—the most vivid characters in the book—their vernacular—the Southern, the Yankee, the Mid-Western, each an accurate transcription. And the hell of it all, the inordinate suffering, the blind obstinacy, hatred of the war, love of commanders; and the laughter, the spoofing, vaingloriousness, heroism, cowardice, chicanery, humanity. The poem has a cinematographic scheme. It is the right scheme for so vast and swift a canvas. But the poet has failed in important particulars. Many of the shots are entirely unnecessary. Others come in at the wrong time. Often, a battlescene is interrupted for the sake of imposing a sardonic moral, a moral in the manner of Sandburg. Often, the poet stops a scene to tell you that historians have fabricated sentimental lies at this point. Then again, lyrics are introduced by way of underscoring the mood of a character or situation. These are written out of the poet's nature. Too often, he writes out of his

own person. Such passages are fine in themselves, but obscure the dramatis personæ or retard the dramatic progression.

The order of the material follows the historic order—from Harpers Ferry, Fort Sumter, Bull Run, through Gettysburg, the Wilderness, Appomattox, the surrender, the death of Lincoln, the dirge of the South, and the birth of Northern industrialism out of John Brown's remains.

> Out of John Brown's strong sinews the tall skyscrapers grow,
> Out of his heart the chanting buildings rise,
> Rivet and girder, motor and dynamo,
> Pillar of smoke by day and fire by night,
> The steel-faced cities reaching at the skies,
> The whole enormous and rotating cage
> Hung with hard jewels of electric light,
> Smoky with sorrow, black with splendor, dyed
> Whiter than damask for a crystal bride
> With metal suns, the engine-handed Age,
> The genie we have raised to rule the earth,
> Obsequious to our will
> But servant-master still,
> The tireless serf already half a god . . .

Finally, the poet urges the reader not to join shuddering or adoring prophets:

> Say neither, in their way,
> "It is a deadly magic and accursed,"
> Nor "It is blest," but only "It is here."

It seems to me that the poet should not have attempted to recreate the war in its entirety. Born not far from Gettysburg (Book Seven is a superb reproduction of the battle), Benét might have produced a greater poem by confining himself to the one high incident, reflecting the whole war, and the heights and depths of the Southern cause to which, by temperament, he throws his larger sympathies. He could have employed the same cast of characters, actual and fictitious, and given us a more closely integrated drama. "John Brown's Body" does not fail as history: as a revelation of America or of the human race anywhere. Nor does it fail as poetry in disparate fragments.

But it does fail as drama. Raving critics who called the book the greatest since the "Iliad" and "Odyssey" were most unjust to Benét. One need only go back to Goethe's "Faust" or to Whitman's "Leaves" to see how unsparing such praise is. Goethe and Whitman each spent a lifetime on works unfinished at their death. Possibly, Benét has not yet finished "John Brown's Body." Perhaps he will revise and enlarge it down to his final breath. What he has done with the theme has enough grandeur for the grandeur to be carried on. I am heartily glad the book is popular. But I trust, even more heartily, the poet will not let his public give him the impression that his work is done. The economic issues of any war are also issues in the lives of poets. The success of his book has freed Benét from the terrible bugaboo. He may now invite his soul to loaf, and make his book a companion of the Leaves. Walt, at the heart of hospital camps, was certain no poet could encompass the Civil War. It is time for some stripling to show the old prophet where he was wrong. Stephen Benét has made a fine start in that direction.

Isidor Schneider, a self-educated person and poet, is the author of "The Temptation Of Anthony," a narrative remarkable for its integrated power, dynamic action and reality of vision. The tale contains a very small cast of characters fastened in the narrow setting of a small town. But the two main characters, an idealistic atheist and his voluptuous woman, hounded, beggared and forced apart by the Philistinism of neighbors, have universal implications. The verse, a vigorous blending of blank and free, unfolds the novel with appropriate undulations. Schneider plays a supple instrument: erotic, philosophic, sardonic, and at all times human. Old Anthony has become estranged from his family because of his heretical ideas. "My father worships his own head!" cries the son and weds a respectable widow respectably. The old man is ostracized by the town:

> The world outside was Winter, putting the white mold
> on the green of life, and ice-eyed people spied upon him.

Laughing uproariously, Anthony shuts himself in and reads his books over; but the books aggravate his loneliness. He decides to visit the library, where humane books make friends of human readers. His visit is barred by the shocked librarian. The old man goes back to Gibbon and muses:

> "I have my own history to laugh at, Gibbon; I see the joke and am its butt as well as its philosopher."

Shut in more and more, the old fellow leafs over some lewd illustrations and stops "over a tavern picture wherein men guzzled and winked at decanter-breasted barmaids." "It is a cheat," says Anthony, but he resolves to become a toper among topers —"And I will have a barmaid, too." The woman who comes to do the housework is sent for a pint of brandy. She is straight out of Rabelais or a fleshy canvas by Rubens:

> The railroad killed her man. She had made Death handsome with her weeds
> and tuneful with her weeping; and outlived the death quickly . . .

Her house became the haunt of bachelors from five towns round, each man boasting, " 'Twas I that made her whore," and then marrying elsewhere. "She wanted any man to sing with, dance with, drink with, lie with." Not even the "crow's confederacy that men connive . . . circling the sinking woman" could stifle the "invulnerable joy which served her for a conscience and gave a charter of delight to all vicissitude." She brings the brandy to Anthony, and with it "the resinous woman whose pap juice it might be." "Only a human body could bandage" the wounded sage. "Alone he would have made a poison of the brandy." They drink, they sing, they dance, the woman "folding over him." "They lay abed, their heads quite out of a window." Passers-by in the morning find them hanging there. Gossip flies townward.

Anthony receives "a cunning letter" from the town shepherd. The minister advises him "to give her back her dignity before the world—" in short, to marry the servant. Anthony jokingly proposes to "get a ring in a five cent store," a suggestion the

woman embraces joyfully—much to his inner disgust. He sends a sardonic retort to the minister. Meanwhile, the woman, away on her errands, has been approached by the enemy. One day, she reduces Anthony with caresses and confronts him with: "Let it be a real wedding in church." He towers with rage and accuses her of conniving with the town. She retaliates: "Calling a thing a bad name does not make it bad. I am not like you."

> "You can live in a hole in the woods reading more books than you meet
> people. It hurts me to be hated and despised. For a long time I didn't care. But we are old. When you do not believe in God I am afraid."

Anthony lets loose an impassioned harangue against the neighbors: "They begrudge me the luxury of a free mind which they cannot afford because it must be earned by bravery and labor." He orders her to go back: "Tell them their church will never have me." The woman hisses at him: "You aint a man. There aint a sound gut in you."

> "You have no fight. You ran away from the town.
> Someone said 'boo' and you shot up the woods and said 'hello' to the birdies. . . .
> You gave up cold. You're no good to me. You're not a man."

They are soon separated. "Once again loneliness held him in blockade." The third part is a fantastic satire on what has gone before. Anthony becomes an author, writes his autobiography, sends it to publishers. The attack on the methods of publishing houses is intricate and egregious. The manuscript is accepted; Anthony has to write his own advertising copy. The book creates a terrific sensation. "Rage climbed on rage." Anthony determines to face the town. "Who throws the first stone?" he demands. Everybody throws it, and the heretic is buried beneath the last stone, cast by the Librarian. After Anthony's burial, the inevitable happens. His book is a classic; he becomes a martyr to truth; his house on the hill is shown to visiting idolaters. It is now "the shrine." And the little town,

bathed in the reflected glory of its noblest son, rears a nice tall monument to him.

From the small town we return to the metropolis, and to the school of hard-boiled poets of which Joseph Moncure March is the most distinctive member. Born on the island about twenty-seven years ago, March went to Amherst College and joined the poetry group under Robert Frost. The New Hampshire poet, a critic difficult to please, considered the youthful New Yorker the most promising member of the class. "The Wild Party" and "The Set-Up" had not yet been written; but I am sure that Frost, who was nurtured in the political wards of San Francisco, is not staggered by these tough narratives. When March returned to New York, he took up journalism and also wrote music reviews. Both facts are important. As a journalist, he learned to write with graphic economy; as a musician, if not as a critic, he was trained in the science of numbers. The harmonies and rhythms of his poetry do not come out of Bach and Beethoven, but out of the streets of New York, and out of those streets where jazz and the blues prevail. His two books are technical triumphs over syncopation; and "The Set-Up" is an advance in economy over "The Wild Party." They resemble the tales of Hemingway in their terse, hard naturalism. "The Wild Party," first published in London and now out of print over here, is an orgy of drunkenness, immorality, sex perversion, cynicism, love and infidelity. None of the bedroom farces and thug melodramas so popular along Broadway have the power and verisimilitude of this nonchalant narrative.

Queenie, the heroine, is a dancer in vaudeville. "Built to drive men mad," she has given herself prodigally and known satiety in every degree:

> They might be blackguards;
> They might be curs;
> They might be actors; sports; chauffeurs—
> She never inquired
> Of the men she desired
> About their social status, or wealth:
> She was only concerned about their health.

Her present lover is a clown named Burrs: "a charming fellow, brutal with women, and proportionately yellow." The flat they live in receives a staccato appraisal:

> Studio;
> Bedroom;
> Bath;
> Kitchenette:
> Furnished like a third act passion set . . .

Burrs and Queenie have a violent quarrel. The clown calls her a filthy name; she grabs a knife and whiskey bottle; her paramour sues for peace. The girl accepts an armistice and defers her revenge. Slyly plotting against him, she proposes a party of friends. Burrs falls into the snare:

> "My God! I haven't been really tight
> For a week!
> Let's ask the gang to-night!"

What a gang this is! What a party! "Christ, what a crew!" the author cries. But he never breaks in on the scene. Each character reveals his own person inside the shifting, shuffling syncopation.

> The only one not on hand was Kate.
> She was Queenie's red-headed running-mate. . . .
> She had wrecked more homes
> With lust's delight
> Than most women could have
> With dynamite.

Kate enters with a man on her arm, "the Boy Friend—Mister—Mister—Black!"

> And he had that air of poise without pose
> That only a well-bred person shows.

"The spurs for Burrs!" Queenie says to herself. Her subtle descent on Black is accomplished with arts of innocence, a mask which fools him completely. The minor characters become involved in abandoned relations and irrelations. Burrs goes off with Kate, but keeps a green eye on Queenie. The drinking

rises; the dancing rushes on; lust is let loose. Hemingway's "The Sun Also Rises" begins to sound outmoded. Everyone is drunk and everyone is mated. Queenie and Black are alone. Sodden hours pass. Burrs is the first to awaken. The sequel is swift and sinister. He bursts open a closed door; finds two bodies in the dim light. Black rises with an oath; Burrs fires and misses; the men close and wrestle; Black wrenches the gun away and blindly kills Burrs. Queenie shrieks; warns Black against the police; but he wants another kiss. The kiss is his undoing:

> The door sprang open
> And the cops rushed in.

"The Set-Up" is a better poem by virtue of its greater economy. The lines are more trim and caustic. Nothing is forced, not even the rhymes. Whole scenes and lives are exposed in a few stark strokes. Pansy Jones, a Negro middleweight, is the hero. He is a has-been who, ten years ago, would have had a chance at the middleweight crown—"but his skin was brown." At the height of his promise, the law steps in: "He had an extra wife and three scrawny brats living like sewer rats."

> "Not guilty," Pansy pled.
> "Guilty," the jury said.
>
> Elections were coming.
> The judge was firm.
> Pansy went up for a five year term.

The prelude closes on this laconic note. Part Two skips ten years. Kids are coming up, "champions in the making." The old fighters never come back—"Time hits the hardest blows." The scene shifts to Herman's bar:

> A joint for sneaks,
> Tin-horn sports
> And gutter sheiks.

The slang throughout is absolutely perfect. Three men meet by appointment: Cohn and MacPhail, two crooked managers in partnership, and Tony Morelli, "a small-time manager with big-

time hopes." The Italian greets the crooked callers sociably; he is as crooked as they are. McPhail, who "hated these god-damn social birds," is limned in four crisp lines:

> "Hello," he muttered,
> And spat.
> He pulled out a chair
> And sat.

Cohn has to do the talking and Cohn talks well. The upshot of the conference is this: Morelli is managing a rising middleweight, Sailor Gray. Since "the best man wins" is "all so much bologny," Tony is after a set-up to help Gray advance. As the partners have Pansy in tow, the nigger would be just the man. The partners demand and receive "sixty bucks" for their traffic. Unhappily for the scheme, they do not take Pansy into their confidence. If they told him to throw the fight, they would have to give him a third share of the money. Since the has-been hasn't a chance against Gray in a fair fight, silence will do. Let him take his bloody medicine while they take the sixty bucks. Part Four opens in the dressing rooms of The Star Arena:

> The Star Arena reeked with age:
> It smelled like the bottom of a monkey cage.

Smells, sights, the preliminary fighters and their handlers, are vividly exposed. Nothing could be more nauseous to the civilized mind. One kid is in for his first fight; he is frightfully nervous. An older fighter is ready to take another knockout. Still others wait their turn: a gamut of fighters is revealed, each in his separate character. In the background, we hear the Roman roar of the crowd, clamoring for bloodshed. Now we meet Pansy—a magnificent relic dressed in the relics of dudish days. He is at ease and affable: nothing worries the veteran blandly changing into purple tights. A little bantam enters, accompanied by a horde of handlers—"everybody and his brother."

> "Dat's Battlin' Kovinsky:
> He's havin' it out

Wid a kid named Horowitz:
Feature bout."

Pansy and Sailor Gray are down for the semi-finals. One by one, the first four bouts are fought. The results are recorded in descriptions of the returning fighters. Appetites are cunningly whetted for more gore. There has not been enough for a dollar. The great audience snarls and stamps and swears. Part Five opens with the mob around the ring. Pansy and the Sailor are led in to provide better butchery. After a swaying, undulating, ferocious battle, in which the Sailor has the upper hand, the weakened and doddering Pansy, lashing out blindly, strikes something hard. Gray is knocked cold. A furious sequel ensues. Morelli follows the worn-out darky to his dressing room and accuses him of double-crossing. Pansy blinks with amazement:

Twenty bucks—?
No such luck!
He hadn't gotten
A god damned buck.

Pansy and Morelli close. The Italian is knocked down, bounds up, swears vengeance and rushes out. Pansy says good-by to his handlers and attempts a catlike exit from the building. A gang of toughs, headed by Gray and the Italian, loom in the night. The negro rushes down a subway entrance with the gang in pursuit. They corner him on the express platform. A train is in sight. In the one-sided scuffle, Pansy pulls out a razor and slashes Morelli. Gray and Pansy lock and wrestle; the Sailor wrenches away; the Negro crashes to the track.

They turned their heads
So as not to see. . . .

He crooked one arm
Around his head.

He crouched,
Ready to duck.

The train screeched
And struck.

Youth Moves on Toward Maturity

Of the other New York poets, or poets who have settled on the island, mention must be made of MacKnight Black, Kenneth Fearing, Samuel Hoffenstein, Dorothy Parker, Keene Wallis. Fearing and Wallis belong to the tradition of *The Masses;* they continue the fight for the underdog with more artistry than most of their forbears. Wallis has issued one book, "Bands And Rebels," containing seven short human narratives skillfully unfolded. Wallis' muse is softer, more languid than Fearing's. Fearing is directly concerned with the evils and buncombe of Manhattan. His ironies are as savage as those of Michael Gold, John Dos Passos or John Howard Lawson, poets who write fiery novels and plays. Fearing is at his best in blunt poems, such as Jake:

> Too bad for her with the kids and all
> (Certainly is), and the room's too small
> For all those undertaker chairs.
> (The choir had to sit on the stairs.)
> Jake's played his last ace, finished the race,
> Lilies for Jake and a harp to play.
> We all must come to it some day. (Hey?)
> Last Saturday Jake was roaring tight.
> Good-bye forever old poker-face,
> See you at Joe's next Saturday night.

Mrs. Parker and Hoffenstein are the immensely popular cynics of the town. Both happen to be better poets than most of our cynics of the past, for both have been raised on tragic disillusion and write with expert accomplishment. Mrs. Parker's poems on the male are thoroughly catty: they owe their flippancy to Edna Millay. Hoffenstein's poems on the female are equally smart: they sound like ripostes to the author of "Enough Rope." And both cynics are haunted by modern metaphysics, especially Hoffenstein. But he refuses to be deluded by any one system of thought. Nothing can fool this man; nothing can fool the woman. Like the colyumists from whom they derive, these people are sophisticated. The big town may fool the small town; it cannot fool these twain. They are masters of the school called wise-cracking. In the midst of life and death,

love and disillusion, hope and despair, a sudden wise-crack lashes the mushy emotions. Here are some of Mrs. Parker's lunges:

> Three be the things I shall have till I die:
> Laughter and hope and a sock in the eye. . . .
>
> Inertia rides and riddles me;
> The which is called Philosophy. . . .
>
> Men seldom make passes
> At girls who wear glasses. . . .

And here is her meditation on suicide:

> Razors pain you;
> Rivers are damp;
> Acids stain you;
> And drugs cause cramp.
> Guns aren't lawful;
> Nooses give;
> Gas smells awful;
> You might as well live.

That Hoffenstein refuses to praise a thing comes out of the title, "Poems In Praise Of Practically Nothing." His work is more robust than Mrs. Parker's. Like the traditional clowns from the Hartford Wits and The Croakers down to the present, Hoffenstein is erudite. He parodies the styles of the latest as well as the oldest poets. The parodies on Yeats and Robinson are very efficient. Hoffenstein's philosophic nihilism is contained in the quatrain:

> You buy some flowers for your table;
> You tend them tenderly as you're able;
> You fetch them water from hither and thither—
> What thanks do you get for it all? They wither.

So does everything and everybody else. In answer to Miss Millay, Hoffenstein writes:

> I burned my candle at both ends,
> And now have neither foes nor friends;
> For all the lovely light begotten,
> I'm paying now in feeling rotten.

Youth Moves on Toward Maturity

Reading this poet awhile, you discover there's something rotten in the state of America. The opening poem of "songs to break the tedium of riding a bicycle, seeing one's friends, or heartbreak," is a bored diatribe on standardization:

> Along the country roads there grow
> Willow-trees and Texaco,
> Mobiloils and marigold
> And other fruits of men and mould.
> Oh, how my town-tried heart desires
> To know the peace of Kelly Tires,
> To hear the robin in the grass
> Sing, "Socony," as I pass!
> Some day I shall fly the rut
> And build a small, bucolic hut,
> Trim a hedge and hop a stile,
> Walk my Camel for a mile,
> Milk a mid-Victorian cow—
> Eventually, but not now.

After so sound a dirge, one wonders whether any American could ever lift his head again. The machine-age has flattened all hope.

Alas for the inconsistency of human soil: no sooner had Lafayette College sent us the lugubrious Hoffenstein than it sent us a youth who adored the very machines which had buried the irreverent Samuel. Last spring, a book called "Machinery" appeared, signed by MacKnight Black. Stemming from Sandburg's "Smoke And Steel," "Machinery" is not alone a complete acceptance of machines, but it addresses them with pæans composed of mystic ecstasy. Machines and the men who shape and run them are glorified. The civilization erected by machinery is perforce the greatest in history, and New York the greatest capital. From the tallest skyscraper down to the darkest subway, machines and the things they build are the happy rage of this Pennsylvanian. His work may sound a little naïve and crude so far, but there is no denying the power of some of his lyric images. Seeing the planetary system as the work of a coördinated mechanism, and seeing humanity as the work of

still another, he beholds in the human heart and its arteries another related system. His machines are compared with love and love with machinery. This is decidedly a new way of interpreting the former Frankenstein. Corliss engines, aeroplanes, fly-wheels, turbines, power-houses, balance-wheels, dynamos, each and all receive hosannahs, especially Corliss engines. Black's Imagistic cadences are rather soft; but there is plenty of time to harden them. His vision is invigorating and his affirmative system defensible. What was noise to an older generation is music to him. He urges mankind to share in the blooming of machines:

> Now a strange mother with nipples of iron
> gives suck to a nation.
> At her side the young towns take strength
> on their lips.

And what is death? Is it "so strong a word . . . that over the earth life shall not be worshipped in the clarity of steel?" "The same clarity is in the wheel-swung universe."

> If this the glory that our handiwork pours out
> Were paler than our foregone dreams, we might despair;
> But, shaped by our hands from the world's stuff, this wheel
> Is like a word our ears have taken from the sky;
> And having it, we move with bolder blood,
> And go undreaming to our paradise.

The poet first understood love by understanding machinery. Of structural iron workers, he chants:

> What love do these men give their women
> That is like the love they spend
> On this iron harlot
> With the sky between her breasts?
>
> What kisses
> Like the red sting of rivets
> Have they left on any lips?

Skyscrapers, tethered against the sunset, "show bloody flanks, as though fierce riders had spurred them all day long." When you despair,

> Remember the pure machine,
> That brief and dogged thing, your heart . . .
> Asking no leave to throb
> And, throbbing, still unconcerned
> With purposes beyond its stroke.

Give not with the hands or the lips—

> Give with your heart, like earth, the old giver,
> Not knowing what life shall come out of its wholeness,
> Thundering the white pear branches of Spring from its silent dark.

I have been patiently waiting for some spring poet to chant this song. The song is tentative, the technique by no means faultless. But poetry also has a mechanism it takes years to control and drive. Black's imagination is on the right track and points its engine, not behind, but ahead.

XXVIII

SHINE, PERISHING REPUBLIC

You making haste haste on decay.
Robinson Jeffers.

THOUGH Robinson Jeffers is not one of our younger poets (he is now forty-two), his work came into prominence only five years ago. Certain considerations and patterns have led me to place the Californian at the close of this survey. If we look upon Whitman as the last figure in the first half-century of American poetry, we may look upon Jeffers as the last in the second half—a view not strictly mathematical. Walt may also be called the dawn of the latter half. Quite aside from any arbitrary scheme, Whitman and Jeffers afford parallels and antitheses to the student of the American race. Both men are prophets; both write in the grand manner; and each reflects his own period. Whitman, the sprawling, gabby tramp of Manhattan, embraced as much of the universe as his great heart could gather. Jeffers, the aristocratic hermit and bacteriologist, finds the human race, and especially the American, inimical. But he cannot completely rid himself of his people. Fifteen years ago, after traveling a good part of the earth with his parents, Jeffers and his wife, Una Call Kuster, settled in Carmel, overlooking the Pacific. "Since that time," according to George Sterling's rapturous biographical sketch, "he has never been farther afield than the Lick Observatory!" The Jeffers home "is built of ocean-worn boulders of the grey Santa Lucia granite. . . . And soon after the completion of the house, the poet entered, unaided, on a task that took five years for its completion—namely, the erection of a thirty-foot tower of the same boulders, all of which (and some were indeed massive) he carried or wheeled from the little inlet whence came those used to make his house. The tower is completed at last, and looks fit to en-

dure long after the English speech has become one of the dead languages." Be that as it may, the tower is significant: it looks out on a cosmic panorama of land and sea; it is made of the stone to which the poet so often refers as his ultimate peace; and it is his workshop. The house is called Tor; the tower, Falcon. Jeffers' version of the classical Electran theme is entitled "The Tower Beyond Tragedy." The poet is an *Uebermensch* building into the empyrean. A proud poem, "Tor House," is addressed to the reader who visits the place "after a handful of lifetimes."

> Look for foundations of sea-worn granite, my fingers had the art
> To make stone love stone, you will find some remnant . . .
>
> My ghost you needn't look for; it is probably
> Here, but a dark one, deep in the granite, not dancing on wind
> With the mad wings and the day moon.

His first two books, "Flagons And Apples," 1912, and "Californians," 1916, now out of print, are overshadowed by the books of recent years: "Roan Stallion And Tamar," "The Women Of Point Sur," "Cawdor," and the forthcoming volume, "King Judas." Each huge volume is composed of long narratives and shorter poems. The fragments contain the gist of Jeffers; they are keynotes to the narratives. And after reading one narrative—"Tamar" by preference—one has virtually read them all. The later narratives are extended variations of the earlier: the Greek "Tower Beyond Tragedy" and the American "Tamar." I have been unable to finish "The Women Of Point Sur," and prefer its prelude to what I have read of the body of the poem. After incest has been piled on incest, one takes further incest for granted. "Cawdor" is a much finer narrative. The figures of old Cawdor, of the passionate girl-wife, Fera, of Cawdor's son, Hood the hunter, hunted by Fera, of the childish Michal Cawdor, of the eagle captured for her by Hood, of the squirrels she traps for the eagle—bloodshed on bloodshed—these figures are dynamic; their tragedy has a relentless drive. Somehow, the figures, especially Fera, who does most of the talking, are helpless puppets for Jeffers' philosophy.

He is a splendid novelist, dramatist and moralist by turns. Whenever the moralist emerges, he writes fiery speeches and makes the actors recite them. These are not the moments of a supreme dramatic artist. And the scenes he invades with explanatory monologues belong even less to the classic dramatist. The Greeks assigned such commentary to the traditional chorus. Jeffers' commentaries are stirring, but they have the air of circumlocution. If characters do not completely reveal their relations to a given situation, revision is imperative. The playwright should ring down the curtain, send the audience home, revise his script, remove his own person and then raise the curtain in earnest. Jeffers' disdain for humanity involves as great a disdain for readers and spectators. Such an attitude may not be fatal to a lyrist or philosopher, but it is fatal to a dramatist or epic poet. Jeffers has it in him to become a dramatic poet of a high order. His achievement falls short of his major intention. He has a glorious imagination; his dithyrambs have the range and movement of the tides he worships; his people throb and bleed with reality; the California background is Olympian. But the artist backstage lacks the hard integrity of his Greek masters. His fingers "had the art to make stone love stone," but not the art to make every word love every word. His love of language makes speech run in torrents; his contempt for language fails to control the streams and guide them seaward. Two men, two wrestlers, two serpents, are at odds in the poet: the lover and the hater, the human and the hermit, the man and the superman. The shorter poems impart a clue to the dual temper of this pantheist.

In "Granite And Cypress," he wonders "why tree-tops and people are so shaken." "I have granite and cypress, both long-lasting." "Like me they remember old wars and are quiet." He scorns our new arts. "The restlessness of talent runs over and floods the stage or spreads its fever on canvas." His own work has the "coldness and the tenor of a stone tranquillity." Here we perceive the desire to become like stone, the desire without the power, a power reserved for stones. In "Shine, Perishing Republic," the poet derides our vulgarity, "heavily thickening

to empire." He instructs his children to "keep their distance from the thickening center . . . when the cities lie at the monster's feet there are left the mountains."

> And boys, be in nothing so moderate as in love of man, a clever servant, insufferable master.
> There is the trap that catches noblest spirits, that caught—they say—God, when he walked on earth.

Wise men should not envy "the little people making merry like grasshoppers," who "dance, talk, dress and undress," and who shrill: "What does the future matter, we shall be dead?"

> Ah, grasshoppers,
> Death's a fierce meadowlark: but to die having made
> Something more equal to the centuries
> Than muscle and bone, is mostly to shed weakness.
> The mountains are dead stone, the people
> Admire or hate their stature, their insolent quietness,
> The mountains are not softened nor troubled
> And a few dead men's thoughts have the same temper.

"Our people are clever and masterful . . . but at present there is not one memorable person, there is not one mind to stand with the trees, one life with the mountains." These are the people the poet has fled; against these he erected his tower. "The Women Of Point Sur" opens:

> I drew solitude over me, on the lone shore,
> By the hawk-perch stones; the hawks and the gulls are never breakers of solitude.
> When the animals Christ was rumored to have died for drew in,
> The land thickening, drew in about me, I planted trees eastward, and the ocean
> Secured the west with the quietness of thunder. I was quiet.
> Imagination, the traitor of the mind, has taken my solitude and slain it.
> No peace but many companions; the hateful-eyed
> And human-bodied are all about me: you that love multitude may have them.

None the less, he itches with another fable. Though Nature makes him "ashamed to speak of the active little bodies, the coupling bodies, the misty brainfuls of perplexed passion,"

though "humanity is needless . . . culture's outlived, art's root-cut," he sits down to another fable, hating the word. And it is the longest fable of all. He is not only a witness, but a part "of the world's deadly and wonderful destinies." He cannot resist the vestiges of his former humanity:

> Always the strain, the straining flesh, who feels what God feels
> Knows the straining flesh, the aching desires,
> The enormous water straining its bounds, the electric
> Strain in the clouds. . . .

The yearning for stony silence finds relief after stormy passages, through tales of the utmost terror in which everything is violated: people rending each other like beasts, members of the same family destroying each other through passion and incest, murder and bloody fire laying waste to the final scene.

Jeffers found his grandest models in the incestuous house of Agamemnon. But "The Tower Beyond Tragedy" is more than a revival of Electra's revenge on her mother. The visionary Cassandra, cursed with the gift of prophecy, sees not alone the fall of old empires and rains curses on future Rome, Spain, France, England. "There remains a mightier to be cursed and a higher for malediction when America has eaten Europe and takes tribute of Asia, when the ends of the world grow aware of each other and are dogs in one kennel, they will tear the master of the hunt with the mouths of the pack." Like Jeffers, Cassandra chants: "Death, make me stone, make me air to wander free between the stars and the peaks; but cut humanity out of my being, that is the wound that festers in me." Electra, having goaded Orestes to the murder of Clytemnestra, in vengeance for the murder of their father, urges her brother to ascend to Agamemnon's throne. When Orestes refuses, she woos him with her virginal body. But her brother refuses her. He recalls a vision of their intricate human family. Man pursued woman and woman clung to man,

> Strained at each other in the darkness, all loved or fought inward, each one of the lost people
> Sought the eyes of another that another should praise him; sought never his own but another's; the net of desire

Had every nerve drawn to the centre, so that they writhed like a full draught of fishes, all matted
In the one mesh; when they look backward they see only a man standing at the beginning,
Or forward, a man at the end; or if upward, men in the shining bitter sky striding and feasting,
Whom you call Gods . . .
It is all turned inward, all your desires incestuous . . .

This magnificent passage reveals the whole of Jeffers. Orestes continues: "I have greater kindred than dwell under a roof." "I have cut the meshes and fly like a freed falcon." The pantheistic youth feels in himself "the great life of the ancient peaks, the patience of stone . . ."

and I was the stream
Draining the mountain wood; and I the stag drinking; and I was the stars,
Boiling with light, wandering alone, each one the lord of his own summit; and I was the darkness
Outside the stars, I included them, they were a part of me.

Electra, threatening to die because she has lost her brother, accuses him of madness: "This horror draws upon me like stone walking." Orestes agrees, the image describes him exactly, and adds in Jeffers' own guise: "What fills men's mouths is nothing; and your threat is nothing; I have fallen in love outward." That one line—"I have fallen in love outward—" hammers home the poet's ideal, the sum of his superhuman effort. Electra clings to "the honor of the house." Orestes forsakes the family, and the family of the whole human race. Later hearsay reports "that a serpent killed him in high Arcadia."

But young or old, few years or many, signified less than nothing
To him who had climbed the tower beyond time, consciously, and cast humanity, entered the early fountain.

Whitman, falling in love inward and viewing the race through himself, embraced humanity. Jeffers, falling in love outward, embraces mountains and the sea. His early training in bacteriology caused him to view mankind as biological microbes

rending each other incestuously. Walt's love and Jeffers' hatred have been reared on a monumental scale. Obviously, both elements, on a grand or smaller scale, reside in every being, human or superhuman. So far as one can limit any age to its leading characteristic, one might say that Whitman's age was all for love, Jeffers' all for hatred. The Whitman period, stemming from Emerson, believed in the virtues of the race; the Jeffers period believes in its evils and vices. The romantic Manhattanite and tragic Californian, democrat and aristocrat, worldling and hermit, require an epic figure somewhere between, or inclusive of both. It is not for any one man to determine the nature and stature of the coming major poet. I prefer an inconclusive conclusion to these pages, and resign every claim to clairvoyance. My personal hypothesis tends toward a mature tragi-comedian of the Shakespearean order. But this notion may be entirely indefensible. The great fellow, whoever he is or is to be, may be right around the corner. Or we may have to wait for him another hundred, another thousand years. The American race may be too impatient to wait so long. The human race at large may be too impatient. But poetry, the spirit of poetry, can afford to wait even longer. It is an impersonal being that takes all we give and takes it all without comment. All of us are working more or less in the same field, each with his heart, head and hands. Whether we are remembered or forgotten does not matter. We create what we can out of what we are. The longing for life beyond death drives many men to paper. If the universal muse crumples what we write and drops it into the grave that holds our bodies, our extinction will be double and complete. We have given our love, our hate, our love-hate, and most assuredly, our lives. We have merely returned what Nature has lent us, and gone the way of our forefathers.

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BY TED ROBINSON.

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TED ROBINSON
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